THE WALL

JOHN COURNOS

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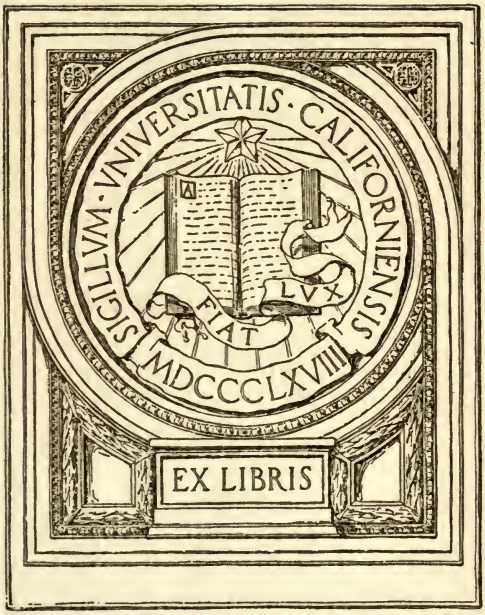
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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

BY

JOHN COURNOS

AUTHOR OF "THE MASK"

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TO
JOHN GOULD FLETCHER
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A WORD TO THE READER

"Don't blame the mirror if your face is crooked."
—*Russian Proverb.*

"WHY does a red cow give white milk?" was the question propounded by a Hindu philosopher. One way out of the dilemma would appear to be to whitewash the cow. The cow may not like it, but the minds and hearts of those who would like to see the question answered would be set at rest.

"How can so *charming* a boy as Vanya have become such an outrageous little villain?" many a reader who has read the earlier life of Vanya in "The Mask" will doubtless propound to the author. The way out of this dilemma would appear to be to whitewash Vanya, to call his villainy heroism, the progressive disintegration of his character a triumph of civilisation. That, at any rate, would be pleasant to the author, particularly since Vanya has been accused of being none other than the author himself.

But it is inconceivable that any person who has imbibed the benefits of Western civilisation should ask such a silly question as "Why does a red cow give white milk?"

It is equally inconceivable that any person of this enlightened age, on seeing his own reflection in a mirror, should want to jump at it and clutch it by the throat, as if he were no more than a common orang-outang.

In Vanya—now John Gombarov—the author has sought to present not his own face, which cannot possibly interest anyone, but the face of the world, and the traits which humanity have more or less in common. One person, to be sure, cannot embody all this; he can only reflect, by a series of actions and reactions, as in a

mirror, the effects of this world upon his surface. Gombarov, by the circumstances of his early life, has acquired the strange and uncanny faculty of mirroring the villainy and goodness of those who look into him; whether one see villainy or goodness, or both, depends altogether upon him who looks.

A Freudian literary critic has said that every author wears, and should wear, his heart upon his sleeve. That, it seems to me, is quite unimportant. What is far more desirable in an author than a statement of his irrelevancies and idiosyncrasies is that he have the power to drag out his readers' hearts on to their sleeves. This the author has tried to do, and he has succeeded or failed according to the limitations of his talent.

The characters described in this book are fictitious, in the sense that they are not photographs of this or that individual. They are, however, faithful to type.

BOOK ONE

SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

" By this way even winged things may never pass, nay, not even the cowering doves that bear ambrosia to Father Zeus, but the sheer rock evermore takes away even one of these, and the Father sends in another to make up the tale."

—*Odyssey* (Book xii).

THE WALL

CHAPTER I

I

A NUMBER of young men and boys, easily twenty, were seated in the grass, drinking tea and discussing art. In spite of the passion with which they spoke and the youthful emphasis they gave their arguments, there was gaiety in their voices; and this gaiety developed now and then to full-fledged laughter. In this gaiety and laughter confidence and hope were apparent: such as only the young possess. A young girl walked among them, offering them cakes from a tray.

The garden in which this happy company was gathered was small and grew wild; it contained more weeds than flowers. Here a poppy showed its head, there a daisy. In the middle of the garden was a young beech, which partly sheltered the party under its sturdy green. The sun and the breeze of spring gave it a sense of gaiety and laughter not less welcome and infectious than that of the company beneath. The late afternoon sun took especial delight in sending shafts of its golden warmth upon the trunk of the tree, upon the yellow of the girl's dress, and upon the rich old copper of the *samovar*, which, in its new surroundings, went on singing its unalterable and pleasant if monotonous song that it once sang under a Russian roof, to the fitting accompaniment of the fragile tinkling of spoons in tall tumblers.

The cottage attached to the garden, and extending its whole breadth, stood somewhat back. It was a modest two-story structure of wood. Vines crept up profusely along its sides; then, converging above the

porch, thrust themselves in all directions, between and around the windows. The remaining three sides of the garden were built around with a wooden fence, so low that even while reclining in the grass it was possible to see down the road which ran past the house. Not many yards away, just behind the house, there loomed skyward three tall factory chimneys, and a giant crane, whose arm stretched, as it were, menacingly towards the cottage. Its half-descending arm, with its ugly crook, properly operated by its small army of human servants, might have easily, had it so desired, lifted the whole house from its frail foundations. But no one felt apprehensive on that score. Besides, it was Sunday, and in our well-ordered society cranes keep the Sabbath no less than human beings. The tall black chimneys, too, showed no life, but stood proud and erect, sentinels of a new order, utilitarian obelisks to mark the triumphs of modern energy. The factory itself, consisting of two buildings, one on either side of the stream and connected by a shut-in tunnel-like bridge, resembling structurally if not æsthetically the celebrated Bridge of Sighs—being perhaps the same thing in a modern variation—was silent. On six days of the week, even at a distance, one might hear the rattle and shuffle of the looms in quick, regular, and incessant rhythms, intersected by no less regular if slower rhythms of other machinery, such as one finds in a woollen mill. The noise would quite drown out the song of the stream rambling over the stones. But on Sundays the little stream, in spite of all religious injunctions, refused to rest, and as if realising its opportunity, made itself conspicuously audible.

These parties took place only on Sundays. On this day ancient spirits seemed to swoop down to earth, for during the warm discussions which went on there were frequent mentions of Greece, the Renaissance, Phidias, Giotto, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, and Velasquez; and sometimes Whistler and Sargent and other moderns.

Old Shapiro, a tall, robust, patriarchal Jew, of about forty-five, was standing on the porch and stroking his long black beard. His five sons were in that party, all strapping fellows; the oldest was twenty-four, the youngest fifteen. His only daughter, who was waiting upon the party, was an attractive girl of seventeen. Four sons worked in the factory—Benjamin, Simeon,

Mordecai, and Ezra. The oldest, David, studied painting, and was supported by the others. The daughter, Ruth, stayed at home and helped her mother in the house.

At that moment David stood leaning against the tree, and the sun, lighting on his brown face, cut rigidly in the Italian mould, revealed all its distinction. The face was extraordinarily like Del Sarto's in the portrait at the National Gallery in London.

Old Shapiro, his eyes on the jovial crowd, said to his wife, who was sitting near by:

"Well, times have changed. Or at least the times change with the place. Who would have thought when we left Russia ten years ago that we should see so many Jews studying art, that our own David should have a talent that way. After all, why shouldn't he? As far as that goes, he's not less virtuous than he was before. He's sure to come to something."

"What's the good of it all? What is it going to lead to? Is there a career in it?" asked Mrs Shapiro, a squat woman with wrinkled face, looking older than her husband. She asked these questions rapidly, almost mechanically, as if they had been on her mind a long time and were only waiting for an opportunity to sally forth. Since she had been sitting there she had been thinking.

Bringing these five sturdy sons into the world, to say nothing of a daughter, she had done her duty to the world: of which she was proud. And having done her duty so handsomely, she thought, the world owed her a duty in return, and this duty consisted in seeing that her sons had wives and her daughter a husband. It hurt her to see so many able-bodied young men "wasting their time"—you were bound to waste your time if you were not married. At the same time, her daughter might have the pick of a dozen or more; unfortunately, they were artists, an uncertain breed; one doctor or lawyer or business-man was worth the lot! To be sure, her artist son was virtuous in spite of his profession; that is to say, he painted strange naked women, yet kept them at a safe distance. She was thankful for that; all the same, it was not so positive a virtue as being married and producing works of art more alive than any possible on an artist's canvas. Her ideas on the function of life were quite definite: the production of more life. Philosophers might have their doubts; she was quite without any. Her mind was a wall which kept her

thoughts inviolate, neither letting these escape nor admitting new outside thoughts. She was quite a happy being in so far as her immediate world fell in with her idea. Apart from this, she had a strong sense of duty to her husband and deferred to him. In letting her son become an artist she was making a concession not to her son but to her husband.

Shapiro, catching the drift of his woman's thoughts, smiled. He was not such a fool as not to know the futility of arguing with women. So he merely said:

"We Zionists aim at having culture as well as commerce when we have our own country again in Palestine. Too many Jews are ambitious to become doctors and lawyers. If we become an agricultural people again we may be able to do without doctors, and we hope that we shall also be sensible enough to do without lawyers. But we do want artists, because through art we can speak to the rest of the world. Even old Semyon Gombarov, who is no friend of Gentile culture, is sending his young son Absalom to the Art School. There he is; a clever lad too."

But Mrs Shapiro was not looking at Absalom, who was a mere boy. She was eyeing his elder brother John, whom Absalom had brought with him for the first time. There was a reason for her scrutiny. John presented still another possibility for her Ruth, all the more since he was not an artist. By and by she would draw him aside, talk to him, and not over-tactfully cross-examine him as to his position, the amount of his earnings, his prospects, etc.

John Gombarov, a tall, frail-looking young man of about twenty, unconscious of the scrutiny to which he was being subjected from the porch, was drinking in the talk of the boys. This was altogether a new world to him, and he wished he could join in its talk, share its enthusiasms. There was much that he did not understand of painting and its technicalities; but apart from this he was very shy, not having overcome his early upbringing in the Russian woods, in spite of his later experience as newsboy and mill-hand. There were points of argument which he felt he could have taken up, and great as was his desire to do so, his shyness and inexperience caused him to refrain. He felt very self-conscious, thought the boys looked at him, expecting him to speak; and this feeling made him uncomfortable.

Again and again, the recurring thought tormented him: Why was he so different? Why did he appear to himself inferior to others? Why could not he feel at ease like others, talk like others, laugh like others? At the bottom of him somewhere he felt there was talk, there was laughter, there was struggling desire; but every feeling, every thought, every word, though throbbing with life, had a millstone round its neck, and in spite of every urging desire refused to come to the surface, and remained, as it were, gasping in deep despairing waters.

Still, there was something in words themselves, as yet an unconscious attraction, and it was this attraction, he was to learn later, that strove to draw, at that moment helplessly, the words and thoughts secreted in him behind barriers, as a magnet attracts to itself steel and iron. This gravitating of unmaterial things tore at those twin physical edifices, which men call heart and mind, as with a blunted knife, and after thus mutilating them subjected them to immersion in slow turbid flames. Living words gasped in them, wriggled like tiny snakes, but found no egress. But when the discussion grew hot and exciting he forgot his embarrassment and found contentment in listening. Once he even ventured to make a short remark, blushing immediately afterwards for his arrogance and presumption.

What impressed him even more than conversation was their optimism and their gaiety. He regarded enviously the inhabitants of this small new world. He studied their faces and noticed that there were almost as many Gentiles as Jews, and that no other differences appeared to exist between them than differences relating to art.

Someone exclaimed suddenly:

"Is he coming to-day?"

No name was mentioned, yet all appeared to understand, for they looked up expectantly at David Shapiro, to whom the question was addressed.

David, still leaning against the tree, turned his handsome Italian face towards Abraham Rozinsky, and said:

"Yes, Abe, he's promised to come. He should have been here by now."

Rozinsky, rising from the grass, walked through the gate into the road, and shading his eyes with his hand looked searchingly down the road.

"Do you see any sign of him?" asked an anxious voice from the grass.

"No, nothing," replied Rozinsky, with a note of disappointment in his voice. He came back and resumed his seat.

The whole proceeding puzzled John Gombarov. Who was the mysterious personage whom all were eager to see? Surely an exalted personage. And not even his name had been mentioned. Everyone appeared to have a tacit understanding of who he was, and unconsciously John felt a tribute in this. He turned to his brother and whispered:

"Whom are they expecting?"

"It's Dan Malkin, once a student at the Art School," replied Absalom. "He quarrelled with the instructor and left the place. He thought they had nothing to teach him there. Most of the boys think so, too. They think him a great man. I've never seen his painting myself, so I can't tell. He won't show them to everybody. He's certainly a clever talker, and the boys look up to him."

John Gombarov was most curious to see him.

For some minutes no one spoke. Everyone instinctively turned to look at the sunset, which promised to be a fine one. Mrs Shapiro and Ruth went into the house to prepare a cold supper for many mouths, for some of the visitors were in the habit of staying late. The Shapiro house was like an inn on Sundays. The Shapiros, considering their modest means, were princely in their hospitality. It was ingrained in their bone.

II

For a full ten minutes the young men reclining on the grass watched the sunset, and maintained a silence except for an occasional whisper. They were too engrossed in watching the red-golden disc dipping behind the distant hill to observe the entry of a newcomer through the gate, who made his presence known in a loud, clear, not unmusical voice:

"Well, you are a nice lot of romantic schoolgirls! The idea of anyone watching a sunset in the twentieth century! This is not the age of Turner, it is the age

Whistler. As for me, I'd just as lief study an omelette, and paint it too."

"Hello, Dan!" said several of the longhaired young men, turning round rather shamefacedly, like caught culprits, towards the newcomer. John Gombarov had observed, however, that two or three had sneers on their faces and that they appeared to resent not only the sentiments just expressed by Malkin but the person of Malkin himself. Gombarov's own feelings were mixed. Like and dislike went together. He eyed Dan Malkin askance and studied him.

Of medium stature, rather well-formed, dark, slightly curly-haired, long-headed, oval-faced, his forehead projecting just above his eyebrows, he might have been a Greek had his nose been a quarter of an inch shorter. There was no particular indication of Jewishness in his features; he was a type which Gombarov learned to know later as cosmopolitan. This was not astonishing. Dan Malkin was born in the south of Russia, came to America as a boy, then drifted to Italy and to Paris, and made a final stay, before returning to America, in London. He went to London not because London appealed to him, but because he regarded London and Whistler as synonymous; because Whistler, to his mind, had created London, and not London Whistler. But his early student years he had spent at the Art School in Philadelphia. He managed to subsist partly on a small allowance from his brothers, partly on his wits.

Gombarov noted at once Malkin's ease and gaiety; if he envied these, he resented his arrogance. All his own stubbornness instinctively uprose, a wall against this man's egoism and presumption. He took those contemptuous remarks about the sunset as if addressed to him personally. Why shouldn't he admire a sunset if he wanted to? There was something to be said for sunsets. But who was he, it occurred to him, the next instant, to defend sunsets against this man, who was listened to with such respect by most of the party?

Malkin, ignorant of the storm he had unconsciously raised in a young man's soul, suddenly espied Ruth appearing in the door, in a pinafore.

"I say, Ruthie," he called out, "be a good girl, and bring me a glass of tea."

Ruth disappeared, and he resumed dictatorially:

"Aren't you ashamed of yourselves? Cut it out, I

say. Who dare paint a sunset after Turner? He's killed it, once and for all. The Royal Academicians are now busy painting its corpse. Admiring sunsets is bad enough. As for painting them, it's a sheer waste of time. And it's better to do nothing than waste time."

Dan Malkin joined in the laugh that followed his *mot*. Seeing the others laugh, John Gombarov laughed also. But not having yet become an adept in social intercourse, and hence not fully capable of understanding clever turns of conversation such as prevail in our intelligent society, he had not grasped the meaning of the *mot*, and turning it over in his mind was wondering why they were laughing. He realised, however, that it must have been something very clever; and he was guileless enough to suppose that it was only he who laughed without understanding. He was equally innocent of any suspicion that Malkin had been keeping that *mot* "on the ice" for a week, and that he had planned all his preceding remarks to lead up to it. Ignorant of this, he could have hardly foreseen the day in which he would not be above using the same procedure. At that instant he could only envy a man who was clever enough to make others laugh.

In laughing with the others, Malkin for an instant lost his balance and caught at a twig of the tree to keep from falling; this movement caused the book under his arm to drop near Gombarov, who picked it up and read what appeared to him an extraordinary title: "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies." Before handing the book to Malkin he ventured to open it, and read its still more extraordinary dedication: "To the rare few who early in life have rid themselves of the friendship of the many." Friendless and solitary as his own existence had been, it appeared to him more than strange that there should exist beings who had so many friends that they could think of getting rid of them. "The rare few"—but friendship itself, he thought, was such a rare thing.

He handed the book to Malkin, and for the first time their eyes met. Malkin, observing a face strange to him, regarded Gombarov curiously. One of the Shapiros hastened to introduce them:

"Malkin . . . Gombarov . . . Absalom's brother . . ."

"Oh, yes . . . Gombarov," said Malkin, turning away, as if dismissing the matter from his mind.

Gombarov, hurt by this indifference, blushed violently and said nothing. He thoroughly disliked Malkin.

Malkin, on his part, folding his arms across his breast, fixed his eyes steadily and contemplatively upon the factory chimneys, now grown a dark purple in the rapidly falling twilight. The tall columns appeared to lose some of their ugliness in the blue air, grew, as it were, taller, their tops seeming at times to touch the domed blue roof. Malkin's rapt, statuesque attitude was a silent command to the others, who as one turned their eyes towards the three columns, now reflected darkly in the stream and casting gigantic shadows across the meadows beyond the stream. The crane, more than before, became some colossal and impossible insect, which, as it were, had lowered its sting towards the earth, with malevolent intention. The stream grew louder in sound, sang full-throated its reminiscent song of days when it was yet inviolate by modern industry.

"He's greater than Velasquez," someone whispered in Gombarov's ear.

"You don't say," said Gombarov, appreciating the confidence.

Many minutes passed before the great man deigned to speak. At last he opened his mouth, and the rhythmic words he spoke seemed to be addressed to no one in particular:

"And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses palaces, in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and fairyland is before us—then the wayfarer hastens home . . ."

There was surely beauty in these words, thought Gombarov, and Malkin spoke them beautifully; he quite forgot his resentment.

There was another long silence, during which Malkin steadily maintained his contemplative immobility, the others of the group, interspersed under the tree, either falling in with Malkin's mood like figures in a composition, or regarding Malkin with a distant awe one inevitably associates with the awe which Napoleon inspired in his *confrères* and depicted in the works of numerous third-rate painters.

Nevertheless, this being an imperfect world in which no flock but has its black sheep, three or four of the crowd, possibly "little Napoleons" on their own, had detached themselves from the group and hung back, discussing the others. One of them was saying:

"You might think he was Rembrandt contemplating the Three Trees."

"At least Rembrandt must have been alone. And he did etch his trees," said another.

"Yes, that's the point," said the third. "Rembrandt didn't talk. Do you know anyone who has seen Malkin's work?"

It was quite true: they knew no one who had really seen Malkin's work. They felt themselves competent to discuss Malkin, because they were Art School prize-winners. Two of them had gone abroad on scholarships. Nevertheless, they regarded this idolatry of Malkin as a reflection on their own merits, and were troubled by the insinuating thought that the proof of an artist was in his disciples. They could not help feeling envious in spite of the approval of their instructors, so handsomely expressed in material academic honours.

Meanwhile Gombarov quite innocently caused a disturbance in the group harmony created by Malkin. Lying in the grass and leaning his face on his elbows, he turned to his companion, in a half-audible whisper:

"How beautifully those chimneys stand out!"

Malkin, awaking from his reverie, turned brusquely on Gombarov:

"Stand out, you say? Stand out! You are a writer, aren't you?"

"Yes . . . I write sometimes . . ." replied Gombarov, wondering at the cause of the outburst.

"I thought so," said Malkin. "All writers make the same mistake. For us painters things don't stand out. They stand *in*. We see nature and objects in pictures, and therefore in frames. And in a frame a thing should always stand in, not out."

Malkin's dictatorial manner shattered Gombarov's usual diffidence, aroused all his stubbornness and resentment. To be exposed by a stranger in that fashion was not to his liking. He managed somehow to pull all his slow wits together and to say:

"That may be true. All the same, even in a frame, certain things will stand out from among others. The whole picture may stand in, as you say, but the chimneys will stand out from the trees or the sky or the houses in the background."

"I'm not arguing. I'm telling you," was Malkin's reply, borrowed from his god, Whistler.

"But it's an arguable point," said Gombarov stubbornly.

Malkin turned contemptuously away, without replying.

Gombarov felt agitated, at the same time strangely elated. He had dared to speak, he had dared to defend himself, and had managed to do it without his usual stammering. He felt both angry and pleased. Not that he was altogether free from doubt. Was he in the wrong? Was he rude? Did not all these splendid young men look up to Malkin? Did he annoy the others by his arguing, contradicting? Did he make a fool of himself?

"He had no right to fall on me like that," said Gombarov to himself stubbornly.

At this point Ruth called out that supper was ready, whereupon the company filed into the house; three or four, however, including Absalom, took their departure, in spite of the wholehearted protests of the Shapiros.

III

Once round the table, the gaiety and good nature of the crowd reasserted themselves. Remarks flew from one end of the table to the other, not a few being of a flippant personal nature; their apparent object was to awaken the wits of the attacked person and to provoke him into retorting in kind. No personal failing was regarded as immune from attack, provided the attack was adorned with wit and the arrow was free of poison, but a poor answer provoked wrath. Malkin led in the assault, which verged on but never quite passed into insult. Luckily for Gombarov, to whom all this was new, he was left severely alone. Pleasing as this was to him, being defenceless against this unaccustomed form of attack, yet so unaccountably perverse is the heart of man that, instead of receiving this neglect with feelings of wholesome gratitude, it suddenly occurred to Gombarov that he was being left alone for no other reason than that he was different. He had always regarded this difference as a form of inferiority, in so far as it appeared to narrow his life, prevented him from living life to the full, as he imagined others lived it. Why should he have been created to fear life, to want to run away from it, yet have a desire for all-

abundant life so deeply and firmly implanted: somewhere at the very root of him? To want and not to want things: that made life very hard for him. It was not that he desired any one thing definitely. He desired all things. If he saw Sandow lift a huge, impossible weight, he wished he were strong enough to do the same. If he went to Buffalo Bill's Wild West and saw the impetuous, turbaned, white-cloaked Arabs racing round the Circus with the Bashi-Bazooks and the Zulus on small wild horses, he wished he were an Arab, a Bashi-Bazook or a Zulu; preferably an Arab. It was the same when he read a book; and the hero's life became his own. The reckless, the adventurous and the impossible in books gave him a momentary refuge from his sordid life. And he still thought of fairy princes and princesses. Turgenieff and Dickens had not spoilt his taste for a fairy-book. He had never revealed his thoughts and feelings, his likes and dislikes, to anyone. Up to then he had had but one friend, who had gone off to Chicago an "idealist" and returned after a six months' absence a smart business man; somehow John found no consolation in the reflection that, after all, civilised man had something with which to crow over the leopard! Besides, he had a horror of appearing ridiculous. He knew that he lived in an age in which his thoughts would be laughed at, and that Malkin, for one, would call him a romantic schoolgirl for things other than admiring a sunset. Yet, he had often thought, was he so different from others? Were there not other beings in this world who had the same thoughts as he and aspired to be a white-sheathed Arab on a fast horse, or entertained some similar silly notion, secreted in their hearts for the same reason, that of fearing to appear ridiculous? Were there not others who, like himself, desired. . . .

He had this habit of losing himself among his thoughts, even in a crowd, and he was suddenly recalled to himself by hearing his name mentioned. Malkin was saying:

"You, Timothy, and Gombarov, take one side, while I and Abe will take the other."

"What's this?" asked Gombarov nervously.

"We are planning a little discussion for after supper. The subject is to be: Is 'The Merchant of Venice' a comedy or a tragedy?"

" But I am not very good at speaking," stammered Gombarov.

" Oh, you'll do," said Malkin encouragingly. " It will be only a ten-minute affair. We are going to toss for sides."

" But I believe it a comedy," Gombarov hastened to say. " I couldn't possibly argue on the other side."

Everyone laughed. Here was surely an original young man. They had long since passed the stage when they regarded things in the light of right and wrong. Even philosophy they reduced to a matter of fine art. A thing was not good or bad; it was beautiful or ugly. Gombarov's earnestness amused them. His stand, however, appeared to give courage to his partner, Timothy Leslie, who hastened to say:

" After all, Gombarov is in the right; it is wrong to argue on the side we do not believe in. Tolstoy says . . ."

" Never mind Tolstoy," interrupted Malkin. " I don't object to arguing on the other side. Besides," he added, laughing, " I believe the play is a tragedy."

Timothy Leslie's recent adherence to the Tolstoyan cult had been for some time the source of considerable amusement to the crowd. His Tolstoyanism, however, did not in any way diminish his admiration of Malkin, who was all art for art's sake. It was he who had whispered in Gombarov's ear that Malkin was a greater man than Velasquez. Pale, with high forehead, his hair brushed back, he had something of the appearance of an " intellectual," whose sharp edges, however, had been rounded and softened by some potent counteraction, in this case that of the fine arts.

Malkin's partner, Abe Rozinsky, was a different sort of individual. High-cheekboned, small-nosed, a long slit for a mouth, the outlines of his face had the character of a carving or an etching. Broad across the eyes, the lines curved suddenly inward with careful caprice and ran downward with a rigid fluency to form a well-rounded chin. As if to be consistent with his physiognomy, he was an etcher. The real reason, however, for his choosing etching was purely economic. Canvas, paints, brushes and frames were expensive, and as he worked three days a week as assistant in his brother's grocery, his finances and his leisure for serving the most jealous of mistresses were not such as

to allow him to run riot on large walls. Besides, he was a thoroughgoing Bohemian, who had need of play as well as work. It is all a matter of simple arithmetic. There are seven days in a week. Seven minus three equals four. What did Rozinsky do with his four days? He deemed it his bounden duty to devote two days to his fellows, who, to tell the truth, enjoyed his company. Still, there is the fact: four minus two equals two. You can't get around that. What Rozinsky did with his two remaining days, God only knew. To do him justice, he did bring around an occasional etching to show; nor was the work without merit, being full of colour and rich tones and not a little poetic feeling, but rather loose in drawing. One thing was certain: no one who had met Rozinsky doubted for a moment that he was an artist; at all events, a being with the temperament of one. That could not be said of Louis Levitte, one of the small group which had withdrawn sneeringly during Malkin's contemplation of the three chimneys. Levitte was regarded by the world at large as a successful artist: he had won prizes at the school, had gone to Europe on a scholarship, had had commissions for portraits, and had even newspaper articles written about him, with some such heading as this: "Once a Pedlar, now an Artist." But there will always be dissentients in this envious world; and Malkin and his associates, despite the world's judgment, insisted upon regarding Levitte as still a pedlar, who now peddled coloured daubs instead of collar-buttons. Unlike Rozinsky, Levitte devoted almost every moment of his week of seven days to his art. A man persistent and business-like, but almost wholly devoid of temperament, his case had been summed up by Malkin as that of a man who "insisted on treating art as a wife and not as a mistress." "He does everything for her but love her," added Malkin. "Therefore," he said, laughing, "she turns her eyes now adulterously to Rozinsky, who, however, won't pay enough attention to her." Malkin could deliver himself brilliantly and truthfully on occasions.

IV

To his embarrassment, Gombarov was given the floor first. Floundering for words, for words came with the greatest difficulty to him, and stammering out those

which came to his call, he began by explaining the position of the Jews in Elizabethan England and the attitude assumed towards them by the populace, as shown by the production of such plays as "The Jew of Malta." There were not many Jews in England. The Jew was more or less a legendary figure, the very incarnation of greed and villainy. Granted that Shakespeare did present Shylock with a few human virtues and a daughter that a Gentile need not be ashamed to take to wife, the fact remained that though Shylock was wronged, the discomfiture of a Jew and a usurer was bound to give an audience of Shakespeare's day pleasure, in the same way as to-day, if he, Gombarov, fell on an icy sidewalk, not only hoodlums but apparently respectable persons would laugh at his hurt and discomfiture. Not even respectable Shakespeare dared go against the conception of the Jew held in his day, and it was not at all impossible that, however against his own will, he was forced to pervert the true story told by the biographer of Pope Sixtus the Fifth,[1] in which it was not the Jew who demanded his bond of flesh from the Gentile, but the Gentile from the Jew. (Gombarov felt quite proud of this piece of erudition.) Lastly, declared Gombarov in triumph, a tragedy never ends happily, whereas Shakespeare's play does; moreover, it was an incontrovertible fact that Shakespeare himself called the play a Comedy.

"I have but little to add to Gombarov's remarks," said Gombarov's partner, Timothy, "except to say that Tolstoy, in his . . ."

Howls of laughter cut the speaker short.

"Cut that out about Tolstoy!" shouted Malkin. "You are like the chaps who read Emerson. Emerson says, 'Be yourself,' and so they straightway become Emersonians."

Leslie took the censure very quietly, but nothing inducing him to continue, Malkin took the floor. He seized adroitly upon all the points made by Gombarov, and used them to prove his own case. It was true that Shakespeare had to make concessions to an Elizabethan audience, but, like all great men, being ahead of his time, he very subtly made the play ambiguous, so that in our own age, all the greatest actors—he had hardly any need to mention Henry Irving—presented it as Shakespeare in his heart had intended it to be—in short, a tragedy.

[1] "The Life of Pope Sixtus the Fifth," by Gregorio Leti.

Gombarov could not help but admire Malkin's ingenuity. He then heard Malkin recite Swinburne's "Forsaken Garden." He had not heard Swinburne's name before. He had also heard the boys go off into a fit of laughter at the mention of Longfellow. Clearly he began to realise that he had something to learn.

V

He looked at the clock. It was half-past nine. He thought it was time to go, but paused to look at the reproductions and paintings on the wall. He stopped before a small painting of a night scene, thickly varnished, and shining like an old masterpiece. Simeon Shapiro, seeing him thus engrossed, hastened to his side.

"That," explained Simeon, "was painted by my brother two years ago." He emphasised the last part of the sentence in such a way as to say: "That's not bad for two years ago, but it's nothing to what he can do now."

"I like this," said Gombarov. "Can you show me something new by him?"

"You'll have to ask David to show you. His paintings are all in his room where he works, but he seldom shows his work."

Gombarov thought to himself that it was very strange that Malkin and Shapiro should be so secretive about their paintings, but immediately afterwards he reflected that perhaps they were geniuses like Freihofer in Balzac's "Hidden Masterpiece," who were so jealous of their art that they had hesitation in showing it. He was much impressed rather than otherwise.

He found his bowler, and was nervously bidding the crowd good-bye, when a young man, by the name of Harry Novikoff, who had spoken little in the course of the evening, called out:

"Oh, you are going? Just wait a minute. I'll go along with you."

He was pleased at the idea of someone going with him, and he took a liking to the young man at once.

Behind him Gombarov heard the crowd's care-free laughter, and now and then snatches of Malkin's gay, resonant voice. The night was young.

VI

For some minutes the two young men walked on in silence. The talk and the laughter had not yet died out in Gombarov's ears, and he continued to glance back regretfully until the cottage and its lights disappeared from view. But the three factory chimneys continued to be visible for some time; their tops were hidden, having impenetrated a dark blue cloud, and appeared to hold up the sky itself.

"I am glad I came. It's a happy crowd," said Gombarov, half to himself.

"Yes, I suppose it's because we are all young, and we all hope to do something. And Malkin is a genius. He's put life into the crowd. If you had known some of them, say a year ago, you wouldn't know them to-day as the same chaps. Take Rozinsky. He was doing conventional daubs not so long ago. Malkin has put them all in revolt against the School, where they turn out a machine-made article. There is only one good instructor there. All the rest teach as if all the people in the world had but one kind of mind, like their own. Malkin can write, too. . . . By the way, you made out a good case in the debate . . ."

Gombarov was listening half-sullenly to this praise of Malkin. He did not know why he should feel annoyed at the tribute paid to Malkin. Perhaps he was really annoyed at his own insufficiency. And he was surely annoyed at his annoyance. Something moved him to reply:

"But Malkin is not always in the right . . ."

"All the same, I'd sooner be in the wrong with Malkin than in the right, say with Levitte," retorted Novikoff.

Gombarov was astonished at the ready replies Malkin's crowd always had. Clearly he had something to learn. Novikiff added:

"Malkin is sometimes rude. You may not like him at first. But wait till you get to know him."

Yes, thought Gombarov suddenly, it would be a good idea to know Malkin. But was Malkin willing? The thought of his own insufficiency recurred to him.

"Yes, I should like to know him," said Gombarov in a half-uncertain voice.

"In any case, come in and see me. Say next Thursday

evening. Here's my address. And my sister plays the piano not at all badly. Well, I must be going in this direction, to catch the trolley. And you had better follow the stream until you come to the road. You'll find your trolley waiting for you there. You change near Fairmount Park."

VII

Left to himself, Gombarov plunged into the woods and walked on the path which ran parallel with the stream. The day's events put his mind in a whirl. He had spent a significant day. He had a glimpse of a new world. As with a drowning man, who is said to clutch at a straw and to review his whole life in those few moments before passing into another existence, so Gombarov at that instant also caught at a straw, also reviewed his life in a series of pictures; he, too, in some curious way, as yet unconscious, was passing into another existence; something was drowning, dying in him; he was undergoing a process of change. He felt hectic; the blood flowed and surged through his veins hotly; armies of atoms seemed to be moving impetuously in all directions as in a small world, dislocating its accustomed traffic, demolishing its walls and its walled-in thoughts. And all the time he kept on saying fiercely to himself: "I will, I will, I will!"

Will what? That was the great problem. Could Will overcome Circumstance? Will was a big word, Circumstance was a big word. Will was a young man who could overcome many barriers, jump over many not over-high fences; but suppose he came to a really very tall wall, so tall that it might as well have reached heaven, so smooth as to preclude any possibility of obtaining a grip; and if that were not enough provided with sharp spikes and glass at the top to keep out intruders? What then? There is nothing left to do but beat one's head against the wall; unless one were to become one of those exalted personages dabbling in metaphysics, who, if you presented the problem to him, would say reassuringly: "My young friend, that is an imaginary wall; it does not exist; all that you have to do is to imagine that it isn't there, and it isn't. Or, if you must think that the wall is there, you may rest assured that it is made only of tissue-paper, for you to roll your cigarettes in. My friend, be advised by

me: let your thoughts soar, and you will be able not only to rise above all walls, but leave them far below you." Unfortunately, having left school at the early age of thirteen, Gombarov was deprived of such valuable counsel usually conferred by some German professorial person upon so many young men starting out in life. Nor had he need of pinching himself to realise that he was quite alive; that he was John Gombarov, not John Rockefeller. Life herself did the pinching; that old hag's claws were none too gentle. But pinching is hardly the word. Throttling would be better, as far as Gombarov was concerned. Every time he felt the grip of her bony fingers on his throat he got into a rage and tried to kick her in the stomach. Perhaps it was his rebelliousness, his unwillingness to submit to his lot, that made her act so malignantly towards him. To be sure, he had to submit in the end, because there was no way of escape. There was always that wall confronting him, that wall, Circumstance, which was neither imaginary nor made of tissue-paper.

All his impulses and thoughts, taking impetus from the day's events, getting into every atom, every blood-drop, sparing not a particle of him, raced impetuously through his body, and at last encountered and flung themselves against a wall, the counterpart of the wall in his life. Battered, helpless and bleeding from the fierce onslaught, they were at last forced to retire; a beaten army, leaving Gombarov in a state of weary reaction. His enthusiasm left him. He was no longer feverish, but cold and numb. But still he clung to that day as to a straw, and pictures of his past life still continued to pass before him. These pictures and his reflections thereupon will show the reality of his problem, the nature of the forces bottled up in him and of those with which they had to contend; in short, they will present a picture of his person, frail, if you like, and ludicrously small, yet heroic in its restless aspiration for the impossible, of which not even its possessor was fully conscious; at the same time they will present an image of the wall in all its immeasurable immensity, the wall which is life itself, and which sensible souls would no more think of challenging than they would windmills. And yet—that was a question that Gombarov came to ask himself often in later years—how many people even suspect that they are fighting windmills? For the virtue of windmills is that you can take them to be long-armed giants. Fortunately, this monstrous race is dying out.

It would be proper to bite one's tongue after that last remark. The modern Don Quixote would not less valiantly attack that new race of giants, the Factory Chimneys! There are, indeed, too many foolish people in this world.

Nevertheless, that wall of Gombarov's was very real. Is it less foolish to battle against what is real than against what is imaginary? Let us look at Gombarov. Let us look at the wall. Perhaps there are other people fighting that wall, too!

CHAPTER II

I

HE saw his life pass before him as clearly as if he had been watching a kinematograph show, and even more rapidly. Visual memory is far more instantaneous than any mechanism. In ten or fifteen minutes one can crowd in a lifetime; no, more than that—a whole world. True, it will be a chaotic, jumbled world; yet even here some individual incidents, or a series of incidents, will stand out clearly, and run visibly and connectedly through the whole length of it, as a red thread through a grey texture, as a *motif* in a musical composition keeping to a single theme in spite of many variations.

His childhood life in the Russian woods—how long ago it all seemed!—appeared to him now, in spite of its loneliness, its pain, its paternal neglect, its tragic episodes, a thing inexpressibly beautiful. It was all a fairy-tale, a dream, a myth. It might have never taken place at all. The good healer, Time, wears pain down to beauty; in this case isolated beauty; as in an old worn stained-glass window, in which figures and objects appear both clear and indistinct. Here he discerned the face of their half-mad servant, Rivka, as he remembered her running with loosened hair from the thunderstorm; there he recognised the ethereal yet clearly delineated face of his loved governess, Nadezhda Vassílyevna; elsewhere he saw the face of the good peasant Kharton and of the peasant-woman Marta, who, on top of the oven, had held him to her warm breast the night she was afraid of the demon. Other faces came to him, whole and in

fragments. And in the background there loomed oaks and pines, giant sunflowers, banks of wild poppies, meadows of marguerites and buttercups, and great stretching fields of corn and rye; and beyond and over the hill, the golden cupolas of holy Kieff. Surely it was all a dream. Then, quite suddenly, he recalled the Mephistophelian face of Mendel, their incendiary landlord. who had burnt down the house in which they lived, and sent them to seek their fortune in America. How came he nearly to forget that splendid conflagration, in which his stepfather's chemicals gave the villagers a display of fireworks such as they were not likely to see before Judgment Day?

Then that journey across lands and seas; that glimpse of England, hardly more than a flash of green from the fast train; that wretched fifteen-day journey from Liverpool in a five-thousand-tonner, which was to carry back cattle. But who was that tall, bony woman who at the railway station at Berlin took him by the hand, as he strayed from the rest of the family, and led him along those corridors, until he tore his hand out of hers and ran back as for dear life? Who was she? What did she want? he now demanded almost fiercely of himself. Did she merely want to offer him a sweet, or did she want to kidnap him for some gipsy or circus troupe? It might have been better if he had let her.

Then his arrival in Philadelphia, a place of stone and dust and iron, his complete disillusion there, the persecution of him by boys, the miserable existence of his family, which had once lived in affluence, the necessity of his going out in all weathers into the street to sell newspapers and of his sisters to make artificial flowers, the insufficiency of food, the lack of sleep at the age of eleven in order that he might go to school too . . . could he ever forget the night in the storm when, going out for early morning papers, he froze a foot and was carried in the arms of Dunya, but a year older than himself, to the trolley and on the way to the hospital. (Dear Dunya, she had endeared herself to him for ever!) These were but the foundations of the wall; there were enough stones left for the superstructure.

Then those barren years at the woollen mill, first as bobbin-boy, then as runner of a " spinning-mule " . . . and again that eternal persecution at the hands of the boys . . . why did none of them look upon him but desire to

insult him, injure him? he asked himself fiercely, seething with rage at the very memory of it. Was there no God in heaven? Nor did he forget the tree he and his stepfather had cut down for firewood on the mill-owner's estate, a crime he did not regret, since it brought about the discharge of the members of the Gombarov family from the factory and sent them scurrying to town again; to the little cul-de-sac in which they lived to this day.

That cul-de-sac! That wall at the end of it, barring all progress, shutting them in. Was not that a symbol of their lives? It is not that things do not happen in a cul-de-sac, not that the wall acts as a barrier to events. On the contrary, life comes pouring in like the tides of the sea, which fling themselves with fury against the rocky wall of an inlet and rage and seethe and break into tears of fury at finding no egress. Hardly less fierce are the tides of the human spirit when they find themselves thus shut in.

Not enough time had passed to mellow the events of the past few years the Gombarovs had spent in that cul-de-sac. There is no beauty in open wounds, in new pain. Golgotha itself could not have had any beauty for a sensitive eye-witness, however common men may have gloated in the sight, and called the sensitive one a morbid fool.

These recent events were very clear in Gombarov's mind, so clear that he could not think of them but with shame and rage.

II

There was his first day in town after that tree-cutting episode, when, a boy of fifteen, he walked the streets and sought for work. After all, a family of—let's see . . . he had to count the members of the family on his fingers . . . somehow he could never remember the number. . . . Oh, yes, there was his old stepfather, Gombarov, his mother; then there were Raya and Dunya, a little older than himself—children by his own father; then there were Katya and Absalom and Sonya and Margaret and Misha—children by his stepfather; altogether, including himself, ten mouths to feed, and their whole capital fifty dollars!

On the third day, walking through the mill district near Fairmount Park, he saw a sign outside the office of a woollen mill which read: "Piecer Wanted. Apply

within." As he had had experience in piecing thread at the Shoddy mills, he got the job and was set to work at once. His wage was three and a half dollars a week.

At six o'clock the mill closed. In order to save the car-fare he walked home, a distance of three or four miles, through the long, rectilinear, dusty avenues, permitting of no short cuts, and giving no hope of anticipating a sharp turn, a curve, some unexpected deviation, a suggestion of mystery. Nothing. Only one straight, unswerving line, virtuous in its rectitude, of electric lights, and on either side an equally rectilinear wall of small three-story red-brick houses, stretching mile on mile, broken only by the intersecting streets, no less upright and unbending, equally endless. And what of the people in those houses: did they never curl up, if only a little, in their sleep? Did they sleep in beds made like rectangular coffins? Did they beget and conceive, bear and bring up children? The streets were strangely desolate. He had, in fact, reached that part of the town inhabited by native-born citizens, much discussed at the time by political economists and moralists for its rapidly decreasing birth-rate. Gombarov, it must be said, was not a little thankful for this absence of children, not lacking in his own quarter down-town, in whom from bitter experience he had learned to see possible persecutors. The way seemed even longer than it was, because the streets crossing from north to south had no names but numbers. Impatiently he repeated the numbers to himself as he walked. Now he was in Twenty-first Street, now Twentieth, now Nineteenth. . . . The sense of figures thus imparted to his mind by this practical system of nomenclature caused him to count the number of steps he made in a square; a proceeding which not only made him forget time but his growing hunger. As he had not anticipated being given work at once, he had failed to provide himself with sandwiches for lunch. Thus absorbed, he reached Independence Square, with its quaint and attractive State House, a fine example of Georgian architecture which never failed to fascinate him; he lingered near the flower-beds and took deep breaths of the flowers' aroma, as if he wished to secrete some of it in hidden reservoirs of his body, and thus to make it last. Then he walked on Walnut Street towards Third Street, and paused for an instant to look at the rotund structure of the old Stock Exchange and the Blue Anchor Inn in

the distance, and the attractive winding course of Dock Street, the whole picture not unlike engravings of some old parts of London, a pleasant memory that was to remain with him. Hunger, however, made him hurry his footsteps, and the last few squares he covered by running, always cautiously avoiding any group of boys. At last he ran breathless into the house and, panting, told the story of his success. The Gombarovs were overjoyed. It took little to make the Gombarovs happy.

Three weeks passed without special incident, except that Raya went back to flower-making. But one morning, at the end of three weeks, without any previous warning, the other " piecer " on the " spinning-mule," an Irish boy of John's age, walked up to him and said:

" Look here, do you know you're a scab? The fellow who was here before you left because he wanted a rise of fifty cents a week. Now you'd better clear out; if you don't he's going to have his gang waiting for you to-night. He's a friend of mine, and I've got it from him straight. And as I like you, take a tip from me and clear out."

" And if I don't? " asked Gombarov falteringly, trying to control his voice.

" If you don't, God help you! That is all I've got to say."

Later in the day the boy accosted him again:

" Well, what are you going to do? "

" Stick it," replied Gombarov.

Quaking all day with fear, his heart sinking within him, his nervous fingers making bad work of the broken threads, which brought down on his head the rebuke of the " spinning-mule " runner, he had, nevertheless, after turning the matter over in his mind, decided to " stick it."

Was it courage that made him take this decision? No. In his heart he knew that he was " a coward and a good-for-nothing." It was pride, shame, desperation, rage, above all stubbornness. Anything but courage. The whole day he shook like an aspen-leaf. He clenched his fists, striving to make his whole body tense and rigid. His heart again and again tightened into a knot. This kept his tears back. Nor did he neglect to call upon Divine assistance:

" Oh, God, if you exist, hear me: come and help me! "

He called upon God not once but several times, thinking that God might be engaged at that moment in listening to

the prayers of others. After all, he was a mere child, with a mere child's ideas of the limitations of the Supreme Person. Still, he was not so childish as that very young person he had heard of later, who had called up God on the telephone and got the quick-witted answer from the exchange-girl: "Engaged. Ring again."

While awaiting a miracle from God, he decided to do something himself. Shortly after six o'clock he waited in the doorway and, seeing a fat woman, he proceeded to walk behind her. He had not taken many footsteps before he was discovered.

"There he is!" someone shouted, and he recognised the voice of his fellow-"piecer."

"Scab!" someone else shouted, and the cry was taken up by several.

Gombarov made a dash, but he was soon surrounded.

"Let me get at him, the job-stealer!" cried the boy whom he had replaced as "piecer."

Gombarov did not afterwards remember who struck first, but in an instant there was a scrimmage, a fierce pummelling of one another, and a confusion of cries on all sides:

"Go at 'im, Jimmy!"

"Give 'im an upp'rcut!"

"Now for one in de bread-basket!"

"Show the Sheeny where his nose is!"

"Go for his lamps, Jimmy . . . that's the way, kid!"

"Try a knockout, Jimmy . . . in de solar plexus, Jimmy!"

In spite of this encouragement, Jimmy was by no means having his own way. Both were by this time bleeding at the nose, clinching with each other, hugging one another. At times the battle was more a wrestling-match than a fist-fight. Annoyed because honours were so far even, Jimmy's champions began to jostle Gombarov. Now someone pulled at his coat, now someone pushed him with a hand. Gombarov was becoming alarmed by this hostility, and quite suddenly, before anyone realised it, took to his heels pursued by Jimmy's gang. Exhausted, he had just turned the corner, and ran straight into a policeman's arms. The boys, on seeing the policeman, turned and fled.

"Well, sonny," said the policeman, "I can see you've been up to mischief."

Somewhat frightened by the policeman's hold on his

collar, he explained, panting, as best he could, the whole matter. The policeman released his hold of him.

"Now go along with you, boy," he said, "and get your supper, and don't forget to thank the Lord for sending me your way. I know that gang. They'd have plucked your feathers, let me tell you. Now go along."

Gombarov thanked the heaven-sent policeman, and taking the policeman's words as an omen that his prayer had been answered, thanked God as he proceeded on his way.

He told no one at home of his adventure. Besides, what if the attack were renewed to-morrow?

Next day a surprise awaited him at the works. Just before lunch his foreman walked over to him with his pay-envelope and told him that his services would no longer be required. He asked falteringly:

"Haven't I done my work right?"

"I have no complaint to make," replied the foreman, "only things are very slack just now. I am also firing your partner. We'll send for you when things begin to pick up again."

Presently his fellow-"piecer" came over. "I'm sorry, partner," he began, "for what happened yesterday. And now we are both sacked. Sure, God has punished us for our sins."

"God may have punished you for your sins," Gombarov managed to retort, "for it's you that began the fight. But what did He punish me for?"

That was the problem on his mind as he left the factory. He gazed back for a moment at the factory, and at three tall chimneys, not unlike those he had noticed many years later behind the Shapiro cottage. A dense smoke was issuing from them. He knew that once that smoke stopped there would be no work for anyone. Looking upon them, the sense of his frailty came over him. He realised he was dependent upon them, those chimneys. It was they that discharged him. They didn't want him just now. They would send for him when they wanted him. In the meantime, he and his brothers and sisters might starve. He resented the fact bitterly. He wished that he were Samson. He would like to place himself between them—those giant chimneys; he would exert himself a little, pressing his hands against them, until they toppled down, yes, even if they buried him as the Philistine temple had buried Samson. A sense of

his frailty possessed him. He realised that this was not for him, not even if he had hair as long as Dunya's. He cursed them instead, with all the curses that he had ever learnt. And he had learnt a good many. He had not been a newsboy in the streets for nothing.

As he proceeded on his way he pondered on the irony of events. Only yesterday he had trembled all over; he was as likely as not to get a broken head. And all because he did not want to lose his job. Why wasn't he discharged yesterday? He might at least have saved his soul its fears and his body its pummellings. What of God Who had sent him a policeman yesterday? What would He do to-day for him? But to-day, so overcome by the sense of contradiction arising out of events, he was in no mood for praying. He was sullen. He felt that the great powers, whatever they were, were teasing him, playing with him; or ignoring his existence altogether. He didn't mind being ignored, but there were those others, all those mouths to feed. And at the thought of those others his heart became a wet sponge; tears oozed out of his eyes and trickled down his face; one or two touched his lips and his tongue. There was something pleasant in the taste of salt tears, a morbid pleasure, no doubt; only exceeded possibly, as he was to learn later, by the exquisite pleasure of tasting other people's tears.

He sat down on a bench in Independence Square: he hated having to face the family with bad news. He sat there hardly dead, hardly alive, and pondered on life. An irrepressible desire seized him to be back in the Russian woods; to run among trees—dodging Dunya's pursuit; to fling himself on the grass and watch clouds pass by; then to run home to his beloved governess, Nadezhda Vassilyevna, who would take him in her arms and call him her "little Turk" because of the red fez he wore. After all, it was such a little thing he wanted. His mind went back to that geography lesson of five years ago, which depicted America as the new land of milk and honey, and Philadelphia, the "city of brotherly love," as a city distinguished for its hospitalities, its charities, its free institutions of learning, etc. John remembered that it was this statement that sent them scurrying to America after the fatal fire which destroyed his stepfather's plans for making a fortune. He recalled his own part in the decision. It was he who had come running to his parents with his discovery when they were trying to make up their

minds as to what to do. He cursed that book. . . . And yet . . . he reflected, as he gazed at Independence Hall . . . is everything false, then, that is written in books? Was not this old building a witness to what he had been taught . . . was not this the "cradle of American liberty"? Was he not proud at heart of his adopted country? . . . Had he not seen with his own eyes the "liberty bell" kept under glass in that very building? It was true that this bell was cracked, and did not ring any more . . . did that have something to do with it? But there was that other new bell up in the tower, which did ring. It was a useful bell, for it tolled the hours, sent men scurrying to work, to lunch, back to work, then home again for supper. Its tolling of eight strokes reminded John that he was an hour late in getting home, and his mother might be worried. Even bad news must be told at some time. . . .

III

As he walked along the stream from the Shapiros, Gombarov recalled another incident. On the day following his discharge as a "piecer" he had bought a newspaper and read the following announcement in its "Help Wanted" column:

"Wanted. Smart office-boy. Good opening. Chestnut Street."

John went there at once. The doors were still closed, and there were three boys ahead of him. By the time the doors opened there were about twenty behind him. They attracted the attention of the passers-by by the din they raised. They were questioning each other's "smartness," trying to discourage one another. At times they formed sides and parties and tried to eliminate individual competitors by a united onslaught of their crude wits. As each rejected boy left with a crestfallen face he had to run the gauntlet of the others, who jeered at his ill-luck. But no one withdrew from the contest. A job was a job. Besides, to have withdrawn would have invited an equally warm reception. John regretted having come. What chance had he against this aggregation of "smartness"?

He was awakened out of his unpleasant reflections by the shout of "Next!" The boy behind pushed him forward, which made him stumble, whereupon the other

boys laughed. This somewhat confused him, but he tried to put on his best face as he suddenly found himself ushered into the presence of the Smart Business Man, who wanted an equally Smart Office Boy. At first, John could not see the face of the Presence, it being eclipsed by its possessor's inordinately large feet resting on the back of the chair. The next instant, however, the Presence raised its head in order to shoot some chewing-tobacco spew into a copper receptacle at the other end of the room. John was astonished at the unerring accuracy with which the trick was done. The Presence then swerved in its revolving-chair and without lowering its feet merely transferred them to the small slide that came out of the desk. Large, stout, ruddy-faced, with large bristling moustaches, the ends of which showed traces of the dirty brown liquid just evacuated into the spittoon, there was something terrifying in the Presence for John, who stood there nervously fingering his cap, waiting for the Presence to speak. The Presence, Polyphemus himself in a modern setting, contemplated the boy before him gloweringly, and subjected him to scrutiny from head to foot. At last he spoke, and his voice fitted perfectly the instrument from which it issued.

"Well, er-boy," it growled out, "what d'you want? A job, eh?"

"I read your advertisement," said John in a fumbling voice, nettled by the Presence and the surprising question.

"You've read my ad., have you? So you can read, can you? Now read that, and let's see what you can do?" And the Presence pointed to a placard inscription on the wall, one of several.

In a slim, childlike voice John read:

"Smile, damn you, smile!"

"That's not the way to read it," growled out John's interlocutor. "Now watch me: SMILE, DAMN YOU, SMILE! Don't you see it's all CAPITALS? Now read that," and he pointed to another placard.

John read:

"THE MORE I SEE YOUR FACE THE MORE I LIKE MY DOG."

"Now read that." The Presence pointed to still another placard:

John read:

"*MY* TIME IS MONEY."

" Now read that."

John read:

" *THIS* IS MY BUSY DAY."

" Now read that."

John read:

" DO IT NOW."

John noted with relief that there were no more signs to read. He waited for the Presence to speak. He wondered whether he had passed the reading-test successfully. The Presence glowered at him, and said:

" Can't you—er—take a hint? A derlicate hint like that! And you—er—call yerself a smart boy? "

He did not quite understand what the man meant. But he was not long to remain in doubt. A young man, whom he had not noticed before, appeared suddenly from God knows where, and opening the door for him, the same door he had entered, said, " This way," and almost in the same breath shouted, " Next!" towards the nudging crowd of boys in the corridor.

One boy brushed past John to meet the Presence. The rest gave their whole attention to jeering John, one boy shouting after him:

" And he thought 'imself a smart boy!"

The remark was drowned in laughter. John hurried to get out of hearing.

He reached the street somewhat dazed. He tried to grasp the meaning of what had happened. What extraordinary signs the man had up on his walls! Apparently he hadn't put enough expression into his reading, was his first thought. He might have done better had he tried. He remembered that his school-mistress had once instructed him to read as if he were addressing someone. He repeated to himself the phrase, " The more I see your face the more I like my dog," imagining that he was actually addressing these words to the Presence, consequently putting into them the maximum expression of which he was capable.

Then the thought suddenly hit him like a squall: the man was playing with him, teasing him; he didn't mean to engage him from the start. There was the inexorable logic of the signs: it was not for nothing he had got him to read them in that particular rotation. It was all very clear: the man didn't like him; first of all, because he didn't smile (he had long since realised that Americans, above all, demanded a smile from you, whether you felt

like smiling or not); the man furthermore didn't like his face, he preferred his dog; the next two signs implied that he hadn't any time to waste on him; the last sign was a hint to clear out at once.

John was then incapable of seeing the humour of the thing: a sense of humour develops only in company, while he had been a very lonely boy. He only felt that he had been injured. He went home as if he had been whipped like a common dog. Thereafter, he avoided applying for work when the advertisement stipulated that a "smart boy" was wanted.

IV

Further humiliations awaited him. He had no illusions about himself; he felt that there was something about his personality which invited them. Moreover, he learnt that sadness invited anger, shyness arrogance, modesty contempt. Men took you at your own valuation. At the same time he was to learn that while this last rule applied to others, it by no means applied to him. He would walk into places with a smile on his face, carefully adjusted before entering, and immediately the man to whom he came for a job would say:

"Aren't you afraid your face will crack with a smile like that?"

After all, there was something in that. His face was inclined to rigid angles, while a smile has a tendency to curves. He did feel sometimes as if his face would crack when he smiled unwillingly. But there was the problem: How was one to put on a smile and yet seem to smile naturally? He practised before a mirror; he tried to wear a continual smile, in order, as it were, to get his face used to it, to break it in to second nature, which, after all, is in so many people stronger than the first. Though all his body and soul wept, he walked along the street smiling, and people sometimes stopped to look at him and wondered whether he was not mad.

Again, in applying for work, he tried to overcome his shyness by trying to look at ease. Thus, while waiting for the man to speak to him, he would walk around the room, looking at the pictures, or shuffle his feet to show that he was not afraid of making a noise. But this would only provoke the wrath of the busy man at the desk:

"Can't you sit still for five minutes?"

Again, he tried to overcome his natural modesty by speaking loudly and by enumerating his numerous virtues for the job in question, which would only receive some response of this nature:

" I'm afraid we can't have you. We are not looking for a manager. We want an office-boy."

Surely there was no pleasing people. Other boys could do this, not he. To make his manners conform to the world's needs was like squaring the circle.

But what did they mean by teaching him at school that honesty was the best policy, and that one reason why Washington was a great man was because he could not tell a lie? He was such a child; he believed implicitly everything he had been taught. He was, therefore, not a little astonished to find that in the practical world, in order " to get on " you had to simulate, to lie, to smile without cause, to assume virtues you did not possess. And virtue was far from being its own reward. (He was yet to discover that it was its own punishment!) The trouble with him—none realised it more than he—was that he could not do these things gracefully. Men recognised his forced smile; he faltered when he lied; the virtues he assumed were contradicted by his whole manner and personality. The Russian woods had sunk their roots too deep into him, and they reached out for food and drink in the stone pavements of an American city, causing the depths of his whole being to be tortured by these desperate searchings and entwinings. Second nature was only beginning to be engrafted on the first, and the two were in clash. Two civilisations, diametrically opposed, were fighting for supremacy; and in the process he was doomed for ever to do things he had no wish whatsoever to do.

He was a tree removed from some remote, moss-carpeted, half-dark glen, transformed into a human form and turned loose to seek nourishment and preserve its existence and the existence of its brother and sister-trees (similarly transformed) in a world quite alien and hostile to it.

V

He walked the streets of the " city of brotherly love," seeking for work. Day after day he walked the splendid rectilinear avenues, lined with superb buildings of marble

and granite, which provided him with neither shelter nor shade from the blazing sun shining in the same degree of latitude as Madrid. When he reached the building where the *New World* was published, a thought struck him. Why not apply for a job as office-boy there? He recalled that, when in the old days he sold newspapers and was out in the streets in the early hours of the morning, he had observed boys coming in and out of the building at all hours, boys apparently employed on night duty on the newspaper. He had always envied those boys their nocturnal occupation; for night attracted him by its coolness, its quiet, its gentleness, its half-concealing darkness. He remembered that there had been but a few boys to trouble him, that men at night appeared more free and generous, that the thoughts of night were different from the thoughts of day. Something urged him to enter, though not without trembling. He went up to the elevator-man, and inquired for the manager.

"There's the chief of the whole caboodle," replied the good-natured elevator-man, pointing to a dignified, elderly, white-haired man walking up and down the corridor, in a preoccupied manner, his hands behind him.

John walked up to him and addressed him in a faltering voice. He fumbled for words; only half of them were audible, so that his speech sounded like this:

". . . my parents . . . many children . . . no work . . . I want . . ."

Something rose to his throat. No further words would come.

The proprietor of the *New World*, who was a famous politician and horseman, looked at the boy not unkindly, and, putting a hand into his pocket, drew out a five-dollar note, which he held out to the boy.

John found his voice. "No, no," he exclaimed, flushing. "I don't mean that. I want work."

Mr Morris Markham became lost in thought for a few moments. Then, snapping his fingers, he called out to the elevator-man:

"I say, Jim, take this boy up to Mr Matthews. Tell him to make use of him. I'll see him about it later."

In this way John was installed as office-boy to Mr Matthews, managing editor of the *New World*.

VI

At the thought of Mr Matthews, episode upon episode associated in his memory with this (to put it mildly) uncouth man passed before John's eyes.

Apart from his duties as managing editor, Mr Matthews had charge of the editorial page. In this connection, John's duties consisted in taking the edited "copy" to the linotype room on the floor above; later, when the copy had been set up, to run up and down with proofs, corrected by Mr Matthews, whose meticulous attention to proofs was a source of constant annoyance to the linotype room. It was not that he had a system of punctuation from which he never deviated, or that a single faint or slightly worn or damaged letter never escaped his eyes. The real grievance of the compositors was that he paid entirely too much attention to what they called "fly-specks." The linotype room would get its revenge by simply pulling a new proof for Mr Matthews, and Mr Matthews (ignorant of this procedure, of course) would retaliate by pouncing upon another speck on the same proof which he thought had escaped him before. To John, who sat and watched him, it seemed that at every such discovery there was a gleam in Mr Matthews' eyes; whether of joy, sorrow or anger, John could not tell. But that Mr Matthews' being experienced real emotion at the sight of these specks there could not have been any shadow of doubt. Was it that he thought that these specks might be regarded by the reader in the sense of a reflection upon the opinions expressed in the editorials? It was difficult to tell. At all events, upon glancing at the editorial page the next day and catching one or two of these fatal marks, he would get into a fearful rage and immediately set to work to look up last night's proofs. No, not he was to blame for them. And he would fall to cursing the linotypers, the stereotypers, the presses, the paper. . . . What a lot of incompetent louts there were in this world!

John had reasons of his own for being interested in these specks. His evening duties consisted in sitting in a chair by the door and watching Mr Matthews making his discoveries, and every time his superior laid a proof aside John jumped up alertly from his place and ran up the

stairs with it. He had to keep his eyes sharp open, for if he delayed but an instant he was bound to be roused by the stentorian growl:

"John! Are you asleep?"

Once or twice he actually had fallen into a doze, and started up to find Mr Matthews shaking him; whereupon, shamefacedly, he would take the proof and fly up the stairs two steps at a time, only to be greeted with:

"What! you here again?"

"Yes, and Mr Matthews wants me to tell the man who has set this up that he ought to go back to the primary school, and if he can't do better after that, to throw himself down the elevator-shaft."

"Yes," the other would retort, "and Mr Matthews ought to go back to his monkey-cage in the Zoo and pick fleas from his fellow-monkeys' backs. Mind you, don't tell him I said so."

About fifty times John went up and down the stairs of an evening. But his afternoons were comparatively free, and he had an opportunity of cultivating other members of the staff. One in particular, Mr Patrick, took a fancy to him. Mr Patrick, who was the leading editorial writer on the paper, was a kind, elderly man of about seventy. He was that rare type of man of whom no word was ever said but that it was good. Nevertheless, in spite of his charitable nature, and his avoidance of all uncouthness in his speech, his editorial utterances had a virility (and a brevity too) which those of the profane members of the staff lacked. (Apparently all their strength went into their spoken language.) Every afternoon, when John brought the "exchanges" into his room, Mr Patrick greeted the boy with the habitual remark:

"Well, John, have you written that editorial yet?"

That was his way of encouraging the boy to write. John's shy, quiet manner did not prevent him from seeing something in the boy. As persistent drops of water can wear away a stone, so these persistent words, uttered by Mr Patrick almost daily for a year, had the effect of wearing away some of the boy's diffidence and, sinking deeper into the breach, stirred in him a desire to write.

"Well, John, have you written that editorial yet?" Mr Patrick asked him as usual one morning, for at least the three-hundredth time.

Instead of the usual "Not yet!" John very shyly, his

face flushing, held out a sheet of " copy " to Mr Patrick. The latter read the childish scrawl, smiled, and said:

" Very good, John. I'll just make a slight correction in it. It's going in to-morrow's paper among the short paragraphs. Keep it up, my boy."

John experienced the exquisite delight of seeing *his words* in print for the first time, a delight exceeded only by one other thing: a lover's first kiss.

Thereafter, John contributed more or less regularly to the paper, and his contributions consisted not only of editorial paragraphs but also of descriptions of little happenings about town. Later he made the acquaintance of Mr Haselmere, literary and dramatic editor, who gave him an opportunity to review an occasional book, taking the trouble to revise his English, with which John was far from being at home. John owed much to this man, who was easily the intellect of the office. A university graduate, a man interested in all intellectual movements, he was held in contempt by the self-made men on the staff for his " high-browism," while his weakness for chorus-girls accentuated this contempt. He was a child in his way, and confided to John of his conquests with a boyish frankness. But there was no question of his immense knowledge or his literary ability, and when things were slack he could keep even an audience of newspaper cynics fascinated by his eloquent discourse, whether the subject happened to be the social economy of ants or the problem-plays of Ibsen or Shaw.

Mr Matthews consented to John receiving space-rates for his contributions. John received four dollars a week as office-boy and an additional six for his contributions. To all requests for promotion, however, Mr Matthews turned a deaf ear. He found John too useful to him personally to give him up. He was an extremely selfish man, whose interest in " fly-specks " was exceeded only by his inordinate attention to the demands of his stomach. His usual procedure on returning from dinner was to remove his coat and waistcoat and to unbutton his trousers, in order to give his digestive organ breathing-space. Even the presence of a lady visitor caused no alteration in this programme. He was hardly less frank in conversation, snatches of which reached John, where he sat. Sometimes it partook of a ribald nature, as upon one occasion when a woman-contributor said to him:

" Oh, Mr Matthews, I've been so busy the past few

days. An actress is stopping with me, and having no spare rooms we've got to sleep together in the same bed. They say it's unhealthy to sleep with an actress."

"Many a young man wouldn't think so!" retorted Mr Matthews, and the other men in the room laughed at their superior's wit.

After dinner, however, his improprieties in the presence of his male colleagues took more rude forms, particularly in the way of impolite noises. Judging from a profusion of these one evening that the opportunity was ripe, John, who had been coached to "tackle the old man when he has had a good dinner," waited for an appropriate moment, when the work was slack and no one was in the room, and Mr Matthews had lain down on the couch with a good cigar—one of eighteen that he smoked every day, lighting one from the other. John began:

"Mr Matthews, I have been your office-boy three years now. I am eighteen. I have learnt something since I've been here, and I'd like promotion. Mr Clarke would be glad to have me as assistant on the Sunday page, and Mr Haselmere wouldn't mind my helping him on his literary and dramatic page."

"You have been useful to me. But I have orders to keep down expenses. Mr Clarke and Mr Haselmere have got along up to now, and I guess they'll have to go on doing it."

"Well, why not give me a chance as reporter? They're always taking on new men in that department."

"Reporter, eh?" asked Mr Matthews. "Have you read Mommsen's 'History of Rome'?"

"No," replied John, wondering what the most modern of occupations had to do with ancient history.

"How do you expect to be a reporter if you haven't read Mommsen? My idea of a good reporter is one who knows his Mommsen."

Mr Matthews did not stop to explain his extraordinary theory which proclaimed him to be a man of originality. Instead, he presented another question:

"Do you know the meaning of the word 'onomatopœia'?"

John confessed his ignorance.

"You mean to say you want to be a reporter and don't know what 'onomatopœia' means? Perhaps you can tell me what 'shillelagh' means? You don't know? Now, what is 'mithridatism,' and what's a 'mittimus'?

And what Rachitis, Gorgonzola, specktioneer, agiotage, dolichocephalic, tamp—now there's a short word for you. What, you don't know? And you want to be a reporter? "

Mr Matthews wrinkled his eyebrows, as he tried to think of more words. Evidently he had exhausted his vocabulary. After reflection, he added:

" Read Mommsen, then come back to me."

As Mommsen's " History of Rome " consisted of several bulky volumes, written in the solid Germanic style, he felt quite safe in dismissing John. Actually, he had not read Mommsen himself, but had only come across references to him in the editorials; his lingual erudition displayed for John's benefit was collected in the same desultory fashion.

A few minutes later Mr Matthews called for his favourite book:

" John, get me Father Gabriel's Almanac."

He turned to the page which dealt with that particular date, and read to himself:

" Ask business favours before twelve a.m. Keep away from the Stock Exchange. Avoid your superiors in the evening. Ask favours of females after eight-fifty-six."

He smiled to himself. He was bound to refuse the boy. The stars themselves had so decreed. He had implicit faith in this little book, and never took an action of whatsoever nature without consulting it first.

VII

Thus another six months passed by. A glance at Mommsen failed to convince John that his surmounting this wall of words would lead him on the path of advancement. On the contrary; with what he knew of a newspaper office by this time he saw that it would only lead him away from it. Not erudition was wanted but " a nose for news." He knew that several men were kept on for no other reason than that they were regular Cyranos, so to speak, as far as the development of their news-proboscis was concerned. They could not even write their own " story," and others were employed for the special purpose of ornating the collected facts. Frankly, he realised that he possessed neither the requisite " nose " nor " cheek " so essential to the spiritual

anatomy of an American newspaper reporter. He was terrified at the thought of having to pry into other people's business, to go into people's houses in order to inquire why someone was murdered, why someone had eloped, why someone was divorced, why someone had embezzled someone else's funds; he knew that on occasions a reporter was even expected to obtain a photograph of the unfortunate culprit or victim in the case, to steal it if necessary from the mantelpiece when the interlocutor's back was turned; he must moreover contrive, in emergency, to turn that person's back. And he a shy Russian backwoods boy!

VIII

Another opportunity occurred. The dramatic editor's assistant left, and John applied for the position.

"Have you a dress-suit?" asked Mr Matthews.

"No," replied John falteringly; "but I can get one."

"M-mmm. . . . I'll consider it," said Mr Matthews, as he resumed his never-tiring quest of fly-specks.

The next day John happened to be standing in the corridor, just outside of the reporters' room; he heard Mr Matthews' voice within:

"Any of you young fellows have a dress-suit?"

"I have," said one of the cub-reporters, coming forward.

"Have a dress-suit, have you? In that case, you'd better go in and see Mr Haselmere. He needs someone to help him write dramatic criticism."

Mr Haselmere, who saw nothing in the young man to recommend him but his football record at a preparatory school and the possession of a dress-suit, made strong but unavailing efforts to get John, whom he had already had occasion to send to the theatre on Monday evening (John's night off) and found extraordinarily adaptable to his particular needs. John began to realise that the only obstacle to his advancement was Mr Matthews, who was unwilling to part with him because he would find difficulty in obtaining another boy as useful to him.

IX

Still another opportunity came. The librarian had resigned to go to another paper. This time Mr Matthews

was ill, very ill. He had been home for a month. The demon of gluttony came to claim his soul as a reward for the good things he had given him, but he refused to listen, and lingered on, hoping to cheat the importunate one by suddenly switching to a diet. John called on him and found him reading a novel and sipping orange-juice. He put his case before him. Mr Matthews got into a fearful temper.

"So now you want to become a librarian? What do you know about books?"

John ventured to say that he would try to do his best.

"Your best is pretty rotten, I must say," went on Mr Matthews. "How old are you?"

"I am almost nineteen."

"Nineteen, eh? I should say you were thirty-five at least, by the looks of you."

John was silent. Mr Matthews had found the weakest point in his armour. He felt at least a hundred. He managed to restrain his tears, as Mr Matthews went on pitilessly:

"Why don't you put on a smile? Why don't you look smart? When I was your age . . . well, it's no good my telling you. You are useless . . . a good-for-nothing . . . you don't know your . . ." (Here he said something unfit to repeat.)

John sat there, his face pale, his eyes on the ground, his whole being as in an ugly trance, quite unable to utter a word.

Mr Matthews, hungry, his instincts thwarted, continued to vent his spite. (What a tender morsel was a young boy!) There was something almost cannibalistic in his manner.

"If I were in your place, I'd . . . well, never mind. Haven't you a father and mother? When I was your age, my father said to me, 'My boy, here is three dollars; go and get yourself a . . . only see that you don't catch anything.' Now, that was the right kind of father to have. If I were in your place I'd . . ."

At this moment Mr Matthews' daughter came in, bringing another glass of orange-juice, and John, taking advantage of the new arrival, said good-bye, and went out.

Once in the street, the cloud which had gathered in his soul burst. His small body was a world in which there was thunder and lightning and rain. Tears came; tears

of anger. Battalions of curses ran in his blood. Never had he cursed a man so, before or since. He wished him in the nethermost hell.

He saw that nothing was to be gained by staying on at the *New World*, that nothing was to be hoped for from Mr Matthews. He had some friends now; perhaps they would help him to get a job on another paper. He communicated his intention to the acting managing editor, Mr Roberts, a quite different sort of man. He took Mr Roberts into his confidence, spoke to him as boy to father. Mr Roberts was kind and fatherly, and dissuaded him from seeking work elsewhere. He told him not to worry. He would do what he could for him.

X

A month later, Mr Matthews died. In his coffin he looked one-third his former bulk. The members of the staff subscribed for a handsome wreath, in the shape of a large heart bearing the inscription, "He lives in memory." John contributed one dollar, to the astonishment of the other boys, who contributed only fifty cents; they considered it an act of treachery and a reflection on their own appreciation. On the same day, Mr Roberts appointed him assistant to Mr Clarke, editor of the Sunday Supplement, at a salary of twelve dollars a week.

XI

The laughter at the Shapiros rang in his ears, interrupting his thoughts. It sounded above his thoughts a tantalising, playful note, not without an effect of mockery, as an oboe above the sombre braying of horns, trombones and bassoons and the clamorous rattle of kettle-drums. The laughter was that of an Ariel above a horde of stamping Calibans. Gay, insinuating, elusive, it glided with elfish caprice among his unleashed thoughts, and out again, deriding them with its laughter. They, these thoughts, the Wall's defenders, more real, more alive than shapes of men, poured out in cornucopian confusion, and reached out in darkness their countless hands, clutching now with premeditated cunning, now with reckless desperation, at the air, whence proceeded the tintinnabulous laughter. The stream, too, by whose side he walked,

ran on in rambling mirth among the stones, and taunted him.

He caught desperately at that note of elfin laughter. He knew that if he could capture it, cage it in his breast, he would be gay and happy, like those others.

Other thoughts came and intervened, threw themselves between him and the laughing Ariel; other pictures flashed by: visions of life, distorted and grotesque, shutting out from view the small glimpse of paradise.

His struggle with himself was one thing; his struggle with the world and material considerations was another; his struggle with his family was a third. These were three formidable walls. Life was a city which had fortified itself against him with three strong walls. And since he had heard that laughter, and seen youthful gaiety disport itself under that tree in the Shapiro garden, he discerned yet a fourth wall rising in golden splendour and towering above those others, which stood between him and that majestic wall.

What was this fourth wall? It was his sudden-born desire to be something. Something? No; to be merely Something was not enough. He wanted to be an author. An author? But that in itself was not enough. There were authors and authors. John Smith was an author, and Harry Jones was an author, and William Shakespeare was an author. How could the one remain content to be Harry Jones and the other John Smith, when the word Shakespeare rang in your ears? There were the young men at Shapiros': were they content to be small painters? No. They wanted to be Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Velasquez. They mentioned the painter who specialised in painting chickens merely to laugh at him.

That fourth wall! There were the other three to scale first; the three walls which were himself, the world, his family (leaving the devil out of the question!).

If he were only less frail! He, too, like the little stream that ran past him, had been drained of some of his strength by the Three Chimneys. He, too, was a running stream into which dirt and refuse were thrown, muddying its clearness, preventing a reflection of God's light and joy.

CHAPTER III

I

GOMBAROV scrambled into a crowded trolley, leaving his thoughts of life and walls outside. Hanging on a strap to keep from falling, jostled in the smelly car by his neighbours—noisy picnickers returning from their Sunday outing—a sense of discomfort obsessed him; and petty thoughts, warmed out of secret places, took possession of that world in his soul which had just been vacated by a race of giant thoughts. Midges, horse-flies and mosquitoes, they came in a swarm; humming, buzzing, stinging.

They were alien, outside thoughts. They were weary of hardened, unfeeling carcases; they loved a new, frail, sensitive flesh; there was immeasurable attraction for them in a young, live, quivering brain, still capable of being vexed by petty annoyances, instead of taking pleasure in them.

Two giggling girls attracted his attention. He had observed them looking at him and nudging one another. He heard one say:

"Wot a funny guy!"

"I wonder whether he be de Shah of Perz-jiya," responded the other.

"Travellin' kind o' incog, Mabel? Is that what you mean?"

"You've got me, Susie."

And they burst into hysterical giggles.

Apparently they had not taken him for a Jew, but for some other kind of benighted Oriental. His skin was dark, and his grey eyes, owing to the events of the day, were intensely luminous. Their comments and giggling made him flush. He did not regard his appearance as in any way advantageous. Actually, it was a source of constant annoyance to him; it had stood in the way of his progress; he had often wished his head were on someone else's shoulders. With its thoughts in it, it weighed at least a long ton. He had done his best to Americanise himself, to change his old-world appearance. He had his hair cut short, he wore his clothes like the

native, he tried to forget the Russian language and everything that he had ever been taught, and he had applied himself assiduously to the study of the American Constitution. He knew that document, as well as the Declaration of Independence, almost by heart. " Whereas all men are born free and equal . . ." He would always pause here to think—old thoughts had a way of projecting themselves between him and new thoughts. " But why," he would ask himself, " were some people given a face to start with, a face that was like a good cheque, ready to be cashed on presentation; while another face was scrutinised unfavourably and regarded as dubious? " He intensely desired to be an American; but in spite of all desire and effort, he was constantly being thwarted by so-called natives, who discouraged him by their attitude of ridicule and hostility; he was thankful when it did not go beyond aloofness. Even the giggle of these common girls told him that he was a foreigner, that there was no hope for him as long as he had the look one sees in faces shown in pictures of Arabian caravans. His grey occidental garments and his black bowler only accentuated this appearance, gave it a frame more contrasting than a profusion of bright colours. Under the continued stare and whispering of the two girls he went on flushing.

" He's blushing, Mabel! "

" Well, I do declare! Who'd 'a thought it! "

These and other similar remarks pricked and stung him. He was glad when the trolley reached its destination and he was walking again. He had still a long way on foot before he was home. His mind was full of petty thoughts as to his appearance. He dwelt on the appearance of the young men at the Shapiros, and recalled three facts: nearly all had their hair long, nearly all wore large black ties, not one wore a bowler. He pondered on these facts and came to the inevitable conclusion that no man could become an artist without cultivating long hair, a voluptuous black tie and a soft felt hat; of the last he had heard someone remark at the Shapiros' that it was capable of being trained and moulded into a shape fitting the particular wearer's character and personality. There was no sense in hiding one's light under a bowler.

At all events, he thought, that was the first step essential to the study of the arts: one might as well try to be a soldier without a uniform. This was surely irrefutable logic. As for the majority of mankind, his logic never

failed him when it was necessary to justify an action stimulated by powerful desire, which you intended to satisfy at all hazards. Nothing is so fatal as logic (this was a reflection of Gombarov's in years to come); for it is logic that makes a thief justify his theft on the ground that the reckless exposure of the object in question would have led to its being stolen by someone else.

His decision embodied still another piece of logic, equally true and efficacious; the logic of the thief who, having got away with someone's horse, suddenly decided to take the cart as well: his punishment, if caught, would be no greater, and big thieves are admired more than petty ones!

There is nothing esoteric or subtle about this logic; a simple country milkmaid might have arrived at the result ten times as quickly, there being nothing to equal the cunning of the stupid. But cunning develops in all who have to fight against odds. Odysseus himself was not above using it; and, moreover, was admired for it by Pallas Athene and the gods. This was what Gombarov thought:

Hitherto, in his effort to Americanise himself, he had given all his energy to achieving in his person an appearance average and commonplace, what the natives call "the standard article." If these honest endeavours to become "a man among men" had been so disastrously frustrated by the face and appearance which nature had afflicted him with, he now argued with himself that nothing could be worse than the worst, that injury and humiliation in his case could go no farther; that, moreover, he might deflect public attention from his objectionable natural features by adding artificial features equally objectionable to the mass; proclaiming in his appearance an artist, he might even turn his objectionable quaintness to account; seeing him in his new guise, his persecutors, instead of saying, "Wot a funny guy!" would reverently whisper to each other: "What an interesting face! He's an artist." (Yes, having stolen the horse, one may steal the cart as well.) He was sufficiently acquainted with the world to know that for most men the cloak of art covered a multitude of sins, except for those pious individuals, unfortunately not a few in number, who regarded art itself as one of the cardinal sins and one of the chief attributes of the devil. These latter-day puritans, living in an age of monopolies and

trusts, quite naturally assumed that they had " cornered " spiritual truth; but alas! there will be always men so perverse as to believe with the Jew Heine that " the devil is not as black as he is painted."

The most serious aspect of this petty decision with regard to changing his external appearance had not then occurred to Gombarov (it was not to occur to him, indeed, until many years later), and that was that the proposed changes were essentially European, Parisian if you like, and petty as they were, they involved yet other more substantial changes in habit and thought, having their roots in the old world, nourished by old gods, and setting his face more and more atavistically towards Europe.

At that instant, however, he was preoccupied with the purely practical details of the matter. Nothing was easier than to let one's hair grow long; certainly nothing was cheaper. The tie might be also easily managed. The bowler presented the most grave aspect of the problem. His mother needed almost every penny he earned, and he had bought a new bowler only a few days before. He could hardly give his mother the true reason for wanting a new hat; even apart from the expense. He might wait, of course, until the bowler wore out somewhat; but with an eye to the *ensemble* he realised that he would cut a ridiculous figure if he wore long hair and an artist's tie with a bowler. The idea of delay filled him with feelings akin to despair. But one thing stared him in his face: *An artist's hair was long, and life was fleeting!*

II

Intent on his problem, he entered the narrow street leading to the cul-de-sac the Gombarovs lived in, and suddenly became aware that in spite of the lateness of the hour—it was after eleven o'clock—the O'Flaherty gang was still up, playing at some game or other, and barring his way. He would have to run the gauntlet. That was the worst about cul-de-sacs. There was only one way in and the same way out.

Suddenly O'Flaherty, the leader of the gang, a young man of about nineteen, jumped up from his game of dice, and advanced towards Gombarov. His body rocked and tilted slightly to one side as he walked, owing to a lame

foot. He had, however, a pair of broad shoulders to make up for this physical defect. He exclaimed:

"Look, who's here!"

"Good evening," said Gombarov, proceeding on his way and trying to look unconcerned.

"What did you say?" demanded O'Flaherty.

"Good evening," repeated Gombarov, not liking the threatening note in O'Flaherty's voice.

"So you said, 'Good evening,' did you? Fellows, he says 'Good evening,'" said O'Flaherty, turning to the other boys, who raised a derisive howl, as if Gombarov had said, not "Good evening" but "Go to Timbuctoo!"

"We'll l'arn you to say 'Good evening' to us, you son of a . . . We'll l'arn you manners that you'll not soon forget," and O'Flaherty flourished a huge fist almost under Gombarov's nose.

Gombarov had his back against the wall of a house.

"What's wrong in saying 'Good evening'?" Gombarov tried to reason with them.

"Fellows, the guy wants to know what's wrong in sayin' 'Good evening' to us. What's the answer?"

A general guffaw greeted O'Flaherty's question.

Gombarov, his back to the wall, looked at his persecutors, and, dodging a blow aimed by O'Flaherty, suddenly took to his heels, closely pursued by the numerically superior enemy. His bowler had suddenly grown valuable to him, for he grimly held it in one hand as he ran, lest it fall from his head. He was foresighted enough to make his dash in the right direction, that is homewards. His experience in the past had given him excellent practice, though he had not yet learnt to run as fast as a thrown stone could fly. The turning which led into the cul-de-sac was in sight, when a stone whizzed past his ear. The second missile was more successful. It struck his foot, and he stopped short, his face screwed into a mask of pain. This quickly passed into rage. He picked up a loose brick from the ill-kept pavement and threw it with all his might towards his tormentors, and nearly struck a woman who was sitting on a doorstep. She remonstrated with Gombarov; the boys were in the seventh heaven of delight. Gombarov explained matters to her and succeeded in appeasing her, whereupon she diverted her picturesque eloquence, consisting of words and phrases not to be

found in any abridged dictionary, to O'Flaherty's gang. She expressed his, Gombarov's, thoughts better than he could ever hope to, himself. In fact, she made an excellent Aaron to his Moses.

Nevertheless, he left her in the middle of her oration, and, turning the corner into the cul-de-sac, found himself staring at the wall which caused all the trouble by being there. He cursed that wall inwardly, and proceeded towards the last house. Once on the doorstep, his fingers on the door-handle, he suddenly realised that the bowler was still in his other hand. An inspiration seized him, and, without stopping to consider further, he shot his fist through the top of his unfortunate hat. He entered the house.

"Look mother," he cried. "I've just had a fight with the boys, and they've smashed my hat!"

"Something of the sort is always happening to you. Why isn't Absalom's hat ever smashed?"

It was quite true. Nothing of the sort had ever happened to Absalom, who wore a tight-fitting cap.

"I think I had better get a soft one," said Gombarov meekly. "They can never smash that."

John Gombarov was radiant with happiness.

CHAPTER IV

I

NEVERTHELESS, he also felt sad and shamefaced: to be a vandal and a liar were equally foreign to his nature. He had hitherto clung to his ethical creed with a pious tenacity worthy of an early lion-fighting Christian: it was as if he had quite suddenly been metamorphosed into a lion and let loose to rend his own virtues. This being his first serious moral delinquency, he see-sawed between two opposing emotions: between joy and sadness, pleasure and pain, pride and regret, triumph and humility, cunning and shame. The positive, active elements are nearly always the stronger, and in the whirlpool of conflicting emotions come oftener to the surface. There was, after all, his sudden realisation that he was not altogether without worldly skill; that he had stage-managed the bowler

episode in a masterly fashion, which quite astonished himself; and lastly, he was curiously possessed by a sense of triumph in having overcome his own moral scruples.

As he wished to avoid further discussion with his mother, he went to the front room, which served as a drawingroom by day and a bedroom by night. It contained a collapsible device which in its folded state, fortified by drapery, served as a reading-desk for old Semyon Gombarov, who spent many wakeful hours, standing over it, by day, and many sleepless hours, lying on it, by night. Oblivious of the purpose of this Satanic implement, old Gombarov sometimes appeared to forget its existence, retiring for the night on the mattress which he would draw out of the cupboard and simply drop on the floor. His pillow being a slender, unsubstantial affair, he would bolster it up with a large bag of newspaper-cuttings which he had collected for his projected colossal work on " A Comparative Study of Western and Oriental Cultures in All Countries and Ages "; the ostensible object of this work was to show the infinite inferiority of Western ethical standards to those of the Orient, and the relative inferiority of other Oriental cultures to the Jewish. How he managed to sleep with all those reports of modern barbarism and iniquity under his head must have surely puzzled Jehovah himself. Jacob sleeping with a stone for pillow was a precedent petty by comparison. He was not one of those who thought that the Jewish mission was to save the world; he had, in fact, come to the conclusion that it was the duty of the Jews to save themselves from the rest of the world. That was his reason for becoming a Zionist.

At the moment that John entered the room old Gombarov was expounding the true symbolism of the tale of Jonah and the Whale to his brother Baruch.

" Jonah," explained the elder Gombarov, " is a symbol of the Jew, the Whale of Christianity. Christianity has swallowed the Jew, but can't assimilate him. What did Jonah do in the belly of the whale? He put on his skull-cap and his phylacteries, and he prayed to his own God, shaking from side to side and beating his breast, much to the leviathan's discomfiture. This was a new experience to the whale, who had found at least one thing he could not digest. There was nothing else to

do but to vomit the Jew on dry land. Christianity will have to vomit the Jew back to Palestine."

Baruch smiled. He was a positive philosopher of the Herbert Spencer type, and took no stock in stories written by "nature-fakers." Nothing could ever persuade him to believe that a human being could be swallowed just in that fashion by a whale, and stop in that beast's belly as one might in a third-class hotel or boarding-house. That is not to say that Baruch had no imagination. A man wholly absorbed in science and philosophy, he had at his command a numerous army of perfectly related facts; and soaring above these at will, he discerned designs and patterns in creation more wonderful than any fairy-tale. As regards Time, he spoke in terms of billions of years; as regards Space, he spoke in terms of billions of miles; Man was an arrogant, presumptuous animal to think that the Universe had been created especially for him, and that he was at the very centre of it.

II

"The proper way to see man," remarked Baruch, later in the evening, in response to a question from John, "is to ascend some mountain by the sea—as I once did—and to look down on the beach swarming with humankind. What do you see but a mass of moving little dots, lice clinging to the earth, or, if that sounds rude, then a swarm of ants? Men pride themselves that they differ from other animals in that they are clothed and that they think. And yet, looking down upon them, say from a height of fifteen hundred feet, the women dressed in white appear to all intents and purposes to be naked, and men's thoughts are the last thing you are cognisant of. The thought inevitably occurs to you: what difference can it make to God, if there is a God, as to whether men and women dress or not, as to whether they have thoughts or not? These can be of importance only to men themselves, for in the infinitesimal divisibility of the universe, every creature, though it be no more than a louse, is a world in itself, to which the rest of creation is a thing limited in the degree of its comprehension. A cabbage is a world to a worm or a snail; while it is quite possible that when the cock crows he may actually feel, as in Rostand's play, that he wakes the dawn. Men are proud

of their civilisation, and that, with their inventions, they are capable of exploiting the earth. We also know that civilised states of society exist among ants, certain tribes of which maintain domestic lice for milk, just as we maintain milch-cows. Again, we know that a perfect state of socialism exists among honey-bees, which, in Socialists' eyes, should place the bee civilisation above our own. As for that, there are ants sufficiently civilised to wage regular wars in no wise different from human wars."

"That's a terrible thought," observed John. "Isn't there any hope, then, for man?"

"To be sure, there is," replied John's uncle. "His salvation lies, in fact, in that he is essentially a hoping animal. On all sides is the ruthlessness of nature, the destructive and creative elements of life, equally cruel and evil. In the struggle for existence the weed displaces the rose, the strong the weak. The natural forces have an equal disregard of the so-called good, and the so-called beautiful. Finding their earthly castles so unstable, men build themselves castles in the air and people them with thoughts and desires of the ultimate. Faith and Reason offer solace to the unfortunates; men pass from one to the other—where one ends the other begins."

"Where does art come in?" asked John.

"Faith and Reason take in Art. Sometimes art belongs to one, sometimes to the other; often it is the two combined. Men have a desire to create, because they long for perfection, which is not of this world. They have an aspiration to be gods themselves, and they have to make the best of the material they have on earth. And so they seek a justification of the unjustifiable, the harmonising of chaos; and attribute a geometric *raison d'être* to pain and suffering. The extremists in Faith call upon men to justify themselves before God; the extremists in Reason call upon God to justify Himself and His works before men. There are beings in whom the two moods clash; in others they meet and are reconciled. I should think that such perfect beings are rare. At all events, it is certain that religious fanatics, philosophers and artists live in a world of their own making. Other men place great value on diamonds and other jewels, which are only worth so much because they are rare and others have not got them. But intellectual and

æsthetic pleasures provide mines which are open to all; these are inexhaustible, and their products are as unlimited as geometrical forms."

This talk was greatly to John's liking. Hitherto he had paid little attention to his uncle, although he knew him to be a man of immense knowledge. That was perhaps because the man was his stepfather's brother, and he detested his stepfather for squandering the family's money in chemical experiments and bringing the family to such a pass, and for begetting children for whom he failed to provide; throwing the whole burden upon John and his elder sisters. But that evening John discovered in his uncle a support and a justification of his own world, that world in him which was still in the making and groping in chaos for a secure, orderly existence. After all, there was this to be said for his uncle: he had come to America as a boy, and made his own way—he was a book-keeper by profession—he had gathered all his immense knowledge by his own efforts, and he did not marry and beget children for others to take care of. These thoughts in a strange way interwove themselves with his uncle's remarks. His uncle went on:

"Life is a progression from the imperceptible to the perceptible, from homogeneity to heterogeneity, from simple to complex forms. . . . Man is presumed to be a development from the monkey . . . but who can tell? Æons of time may pass, and the man of the future may look back upon the man of to-day as the man of to-day looks back on the ape. In fact, that ocean of difference already exists between men and men, and Socrates is as far removed from the average man as the average man from the ape. Scratch the average man, and you will find a savage. Our civilisation is only civilisation in that in the machine-gun man has evolved a more complex and destructive weapon than the primitive bludgeon. One man gets drunken on whisky, another on thought. All thought is drunkenness, intoxication. It was said of Spinoza that he was 'drunken with God.'"

"Uncle, why don't you write a book?"

"There are enough books in this world, just as there are enough babies. Many a book one approaches as a hungry man an egg, only to find it an empty shell. The fact is, I have developed a whole system of philosophy, enough for a series of books. I take up the subject

where Herbert Spencer has left off. But I cannot possibly develop my theories without a laboratory, for I base them almost entirely on biology; and to have a laboratory one must possess a small fortune."

John looked sympathetically at his uncle. He knew him to be no braggart, but a modest, unassuming man, and he could have no doubts as to his uncle having a goodly store of knowledge to add to the knowledge of the world. He turned to his uncle with some concern:

"Why don't you go to some university and ask to be allowed to work in its laboratories? They would be sure to let you, if they knew you had some discoveries to give to the world."

"It's not so easy," replied Baruch, smiling. "I possess no degree of any sort. Faith may move mountains, but only a degree will move a modern American university faculty. You know the sort of thing they say to you: 'Show us the goods. We are from Missouri.' And how can you show them potential goods, which you are planning to manufacture?"

John reflected to himself: Here were two men, brothers, both undoubtedly geniuses, bearing gifts to the world, and the world refusing to have anything of them. Were there many such energies lost to the world? A wrath rose up in his soul against the world, against life; and he asked his uncle:

"Do you think, uncle, you would have a better opportunity under socialism?"

"I am not so sure about that. Not systems, but men themselves are at fault. You can't make a good chain of rotten links. The few good links are not enough. At all events, I doubt whether Darwin would have received a grant for setting out on his voyage of discovery if the decision had depended upon the collective will."

"What, then, is the remedy?"

"Education. Not more education—for our age is over-educated—but better, perhaps I should say more natural education. Not a common education is wanted, but an opportunity for every individual to develop his peculiar gift. Now, that makes for anything but equality. There is no more serious or irretrievable inequality than the inequality of talents. Nature is very capricious in this respect. In spite of all laws and Constitutions, men are not born free and equal. On the

one hand, they are tied down by all sorts of hereditary traits; on the other, there is this inequality of talent. Nowadays, they are not free and equal even before the law, for a rich man can afford a good lawyer. But when I use the phrase ' inequality of talents,' I exclude the rich man from the category. Gathering wealth is for the most part not a matter of genius, or even of talent. It is in most cases a matter of pure chance. The first rich man was one who chose himself a piece of ground for planting potatoes, and on digging discovered gold. His hired man, a modest fellow with some brains, not wishing to lose his job, set to work and invented some simple device for extracting the gold more easily, and presented it to his master. With his gold the latter bought up all the adjacent lands in the hope of finding more gold, but failing to find any more, turned potatoes into gold by charging exorbitant rates, all the potato-fields being in his hands. He became the Potato King. The gold he paid out for his lands returned to him. He appointed himself a king of men as well as of potatoes. Some men call this genius; yet the same men would hesitate to ascribe any talents to a burglar or a pickpocket. Yet, think what skill, what subtle cunning a successful pickpocket must employ in extracting gold from the pockets of his fellow-men! Jesus, being a Jew, knew something about political economy, and his law of wealth, ' To him that hath shall be given,' stands good to this day."

" Uncle, you were saying that chance plays such an important part in the getting of wealth. But surely chance plays an equally important rôle in the development of genius? Think what you could do if you had your chance."

" That is quite true. Unfortunately, political economy controls all human life to-day, and only the aggressive genius is capable of effecting a breach in the wall."

III

At the word " wall " John pricked up his ears. His obsession with the subject of walls a short while ago possessed him again. One, two, three, four walls loomed up before him, each higher than the other, and the last with golden battlements.

"Yes, do tell me about that wall!" exclaimed John eagerly.

Astonished at this outburst, Baruch warmed up to the subject.

"The tendency of humanity," he went on, "is to build walls around itself. There were the original walls for defence, walled towns built for security against an enemy. The enemy, on the other hand, invented all sorts of devices for overcoming these walls: ladders, catapults, battering-rams; later there were cannon. Conquerors were always wall-scalers and wall-breakers. There is the greatest of all walls: the Great Wall of China. Again, there are walls which men build to protect themselves against the violence of nature. There are garden walls to keep out the invasion of weeds and other aggressive plants; there are sea-walls and dikes to resist the fierce onslaughts of the sea. There are the dams to imprison water and to enable man to employ its impetuous energy for his own uses, in the same way as the energy of imprisoned men is employed in working the treadmill. Oh, yes, one must not forget the prison walls, which society has invented to protect itself against its presumably delinquent and dangerous members, by no means always thieves or murderers, but frequently political rebels, thinkers and poets and religious fanatics; for society deems nothing more dangerous to itself than thought and ecstasy.

"But not all walls are of stone or brick. Society has taken care to build itself spiritual walls as well. There are the ten commandments: a moral wall intended to keep the so-called evil forces in men in check, to keep the natural turbulence of the human stream within bounds. There is our legal system, intended to regulate the flowing impulse to personal revenge. There is religion, devised perhaps to act as a wall between man and ultimate death. There are walls in our economic system: trading walls to prevent man's natural tendency to piracy; tariff walls to keep out the invasion of attacking foreign goods; there are walls to keep out immigrants so that the stream of native blood may be kept from the impurities of foreign refuse and insidious foreign ideas.

"Generally speaking, society is made up of wall-makers and wall-breakers. The first are always in the majority; consequently the last are under compulsion to use the greater cunning. There is no more skilful instrument

than a great brain, and not the most powerful gun in the world can pierce a wall so effectively. Modern walls come crumbling down before the might of thought as the fabulous walls of Jericho before the blasts of a ram's horn."

Baruch paused, and his eyes appeared to lose themselves in the distance, as if they pierced and impenetrated a thousand walls, though the dirty plastered wall only a few feet in front of him stared at him quite intact but for the long slanting crack, which was no greater in extent than before.

"In what way is thought powerful, and just how does it pierce walls and make walls crumble?" asked John, in a most urgent voice, as if this problem interested him intimately.

"Thought is the radium of the spiritual world. You have heard of the newly discovered element, radium, and its marvellous properties? It is a metal not found in a pure state, but distilled from pitch-blende, a ton of which produces only a fraction of a grain. In its pure state only five grains are in existence, each grain being worth not less than five million dollars. It is capable of seven succeeding transformations, and in the seventh, its deradiated form, it becomes, as it were, mere lead. This transformation naturally takes several years to accomplish, but the process can be hastened by electricity. What distinguishes radium is the fact that it gives off intense heat and energy, and makes radio-active all objects with which it comes in contact. This property of infusing other objects with its own radio-activity is unique to radium. The various rays which radium gives out can be controlled by violet screens, and are used in the destruction of malignant growths, such as cancer. In its purity and uncontrolled, it is wholly destructive, and eats into every substance. It is difficult to keep radium, owing to this property of diffusing itself. Radium exists in an extremely minute and diffused state in other metals, and even certain springs have been discovered whose water possesses radio-active powers with curative properties. But bear in mind that in its pure state radium is essentially destructive.

"Now let us consider man's brain and its properties. In its purity, that is, if man's thought could be dissociated from his body, it would be wholly destructive. Pure thought is essentially a thing without morality. As it is,

religions, social systems, political structures, and rival thoughts and ideas fall before powerful brains like straw-shacks in a gale. A man sits in a small room before a candle, writing. Four walls; to all intents and purposes a prison cell. A skeleton bedecked with flesh, performing physical functions common to all men, yet with this difference: his skull is a receptacle of a few ounces of quivering, glutinous matter, distinguished from that of the ape and of the average man by an infinitely greater number of markings and incisions, by a more elaborate pattern of lines and highways, a more labyrinthine system of passages. And yet this tiny bit of jelly—of what powerful emanations it is capable! I am not speaking of its inventing and discovering power: the power which enables men to bore holes in mountains, to dig shafts into the earth for coal and other minerals, to connect oceans by canals, to communicate with other beings thousands of miles away by wires and even without wires; no—great as all that seems, I have something else in mind, and that is, those incredibly powerful radiations of thought which divert men from their customary pre-occupations into more turbulent channels, and ultimately produce those human eruptions and cataclysms which characterise history; or the less violent but equally potent changes which modify men's religious and social attitude and revolutionise creeds and æsthetic doctrines, affecting the individual and the mass. The man of action may crow over the man of thought in that he enjoys more normal physical pleasures of life; the man of thought may even envy him and curse the little cell which keeps him prisoner with his thoughts; yet this fact is often overlooked: all action proceeds from thought. The radiations from that concentrated and, as it were, stationary, energy provide the world with incentives for its energy, and infect everyone, consciously or unconsciously, with its properties.

"There is that oral emanation which we call 'The Sermon on the Mount.' However unchristian men may still be, can anyone doubt that these simple words have profoundly changed the course of history? The thoughts of the Greeks, reverberating through the centuries, have in the end produced the Italian Renaissance; more centuries will pass, and sick mankind may return to these radio-active springs for a cure. Socrates and Plato are dead, but the rays of their brains continue to light the way

of mankind. There is the French Revolution: have not Voltaire and Rousseau infected the common people and peasants of France with the potency of their destructive brains? There is Darwin. The rays of his brains have caused a most serious breach in the walls of religion. There is Karl Marx, whose mind is still in the process of diffusing itself among men. Will the strong walls of Capitalism fall under the consuming vitality of his thought? Or will it crush the makers of those walls, the Capitalists, by moving those walls together as in Poe's 'The Pit and the Pendulum'? Poets too possess this cerebral radio-activity. Think how, in its way, the Byronic torrent swept into its course the whole poetic movement of Europe. And to-day Nietzsche, for better or for worse, has infected the contemporary literary doctrines. Yet Nietzsche was sick and mad, and only his brain lived. . . . These are the wall-breakers . . . and some of them have put up walls of their own too. . . . But not all thinkers and poets are aggressive. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, for example, drew different conclusions from the same facts: Schopenhauer says: 'Life is a struggle, therefore let us die.' Neitzsche says: 'Life is a struggle, therefore let us live! . . .'"

Baruch went on. John listened breathlessly. Baruch suddenly looked at his watch.

"Well, well, it's four o'clock," he said, "and I have a lesson in mathematics to give at nine."

CHAPTER V

I

JOHN GOMBAROV feverishly undressed and went to bed. Dawn was beginning to break, yet he could not sleep. He looked hopefully towards the little patch of light showing above a long wall of dense blue cloud, and wondered whether he might take it as an omen.

He got up and drew down the blind; then, pulling the bed-cover over his head, he tried to sleep. The latent forces unchained and let loose in him for the first time ran amok in their newly found freedom, fierce blasts sweeping up old thoughts before them, so many little heaps of dead leaves.

He thought: he was surely lead before that day, and he had come in fatal contact with the radium of thought: he was being de-leaded, assuming the tone of a new metal, more lively and vibrating.

Walls, walls, walls . . . they erected themselves before him. . . . They were advancing upon him, as in "The Pit and the Pendulum." All he had to do was to say a magic word, press an electric button . . . and these walls retreated . . . but they came back . . . they always came back . . . or were these new walls which erected themselves in the places of the old? Must he for ever and ever fight walls?

He tried to think of petty things: of his felt hat, of his artist's tie, of the long hair he would grow. The earlier events of the day recurred to him: the Shapiros, Dan Malkin, the Three Chimneys. Suddenly he thought of Novikoff, the nice young man who had walked along with him, and asked him to his house next Thursday evening. No, it wasn't of Novikoff he thought, but of Novikoff's sister. He wondered whether Novikoff had observed his perturbation when the sister was mentioned. What was she like? He was aware of a terrible want in his life, of a terrible hunger. He was famished for women's hands. . . . He could go to sleep if someone would only stroke his hair. Even walls would lose their terror if there were only some lovely one with him between those walls. Why had he been deprived of everything, even this, his natural right? He thought of Novikoff's sister, whom he had not seen . . . and wondered. . . . He gave himself up to his visions, sacred and profane.

His tired body lay there, a Gulliver bound by petty thoughts, which pranced around him, taunted him, mocked at him, pricking needles into his skin.

Nature at last asserted herself, and he lapsed into sleep. Sleep? No. He was plunged into the world of dream.

A dream he had had as a boy recurred to him, in a new variation. He dreamt he was a boy in the Russian woods. He had a birch in his hands, and he was lopping off the heads of toadstools. As quickly as he lopped them off, the heads grew on again, each time larger and more menacing and diabolic of feature. He ran, pursued by tall toadstools, with faces like those of devils.

Then he had another dream. A woman, hatless and barefoot, flimsily dressed in thin draperies, looking altogether like the figure one sees in June posters on

magazine-covers, appeared at the foot of his bed. In a kind of an apron attached to her skirts she held up a lapful of roses; these were of a variety John saw in Chestnut Street florists' shops, marked at least a dollar a piece. She looked at John and, throwing a rose at him, beckoned to him with an enticing, sidelong glance and a lively movement of her head, which unbared one shoulder of a flawless whiteness such as one reads of in books. John reached out his arms to encompass the lovely vision, only to see it elude him and vanish, not without first putting up the loveliest imaginable fingers to its dear little retroussé nose. He started up and opened his eyes. He thought he saw a woman's hand. . . . Bah! it was only a dream. He thought: must life tease him in dreams as well as in hours of wakefulness?

He jumped out of bed and put the blind up. In the distance a factory chimney puffed out a cloud of dense black smoke.

II

In the next room John could hear the voice of Absalom:

"Raise your head a bit, father. There, a little more to the left. That's better."

Then there was a silence, followed by similar injunctions. Absalom was painting a portrait of his father, "old" Semyon Gombarov.

John was glad that his stepfather was being useful at last, if only as a model for Absalom. After all, it was he, not his stepfather, who was putting Absalom through the Art School. Old Gombarov had objected to his son's inclinations towards art; at the same time hardly raised a little finger to do anything for the boy. The title of father fell by default to his stepson, John, who, owing to his stepfather having come into his life when he was but three, bore his name and not that of his own father.

Absalom's painting was most promising; yet, on getting up that morning, after his exciting day, John felt a pang, not so much of remorse for his fatherly action towards Absalom as of distress. After all, that wall was a real wall, and he was so frail. How was he to become something, when the family needed him? It was bad enough to have one artist in the family; but who had ever heard of two Jonahs on one ship?

Reaction had set in. He looked out of the window.

The endless sea of houses; the smoke of innumerable chimneys, dimming the light of the sun; the whole appearance of the visible physical world frightened him. Who was he, what chance had he of radiating a thought-ray to pierce the gloom of that man-made inferno? It was simply ridiculous to think of it. If his uncle, with his wonderful mind, his immense learning, and absence of family responsibilities, could do nothing with the world, and was forced to eke out a miserable living by teaching, what chance had he to do anything, what with his ignorance and inexperience, his lack of schooling, and his family responsibilities, so absurdly disproportionate to his frail shoulders? In his distress he had an impulse to shriek out; he thought: was this desire indicative of a predisposition to madness? Or were there other people in this world who, even with less reason, were possessed of a momentary impulse to strike a bowler hat with a fist, though the said bowler happened to be on the head of a most innocuous, even charitably disposed individual?

This quaint thought suddenly brought back to him the bowler episode of last evening; the prospect of getting a felt hat that very day evoked a consoling smile to his face. Could one have entered his mind then, one might have assumed that it was not an ordinary felt hat he was intending to buy, but a magic cap, calculated to make him invisible and enabling him to tickle the soles of the world's feet to its discomfiture.

He went into the kitchen for breakfast, where his mother waited on him. In an irritable frame of mind, with nothing upon which to vent his irritation, he silently sat down in his customary place. Presently, two eggs were placed before him.

"Mother," he said, "these are canary eggs. You might have brought a magnifying-glass with them, so that I might at least imagine that I were eating hen's eggs."

"I am not responsible for the smallness of the eggs the hens lay nowadays," replied his mother, defensively.

John opened one and put it aside.

"On second thoughts," he said, "I don't want a magnifying-glass, for it might seem ten times as bad. As it is, it's bad enough."

His mother took the egg and smelt it.

"I don't see anything wrong with it. You smell it, Katya."

"It's quite good," said Katya, and passed it on to Sonyatchka, who passed it on to Raya.

"I won't eat it," said John. "Raya has stuck her nose into it."

"I didn't! " said Raya, indignantly. "The trouble is, he's got up on his left side this morning, and he's trying to put his own badness into the egg."

"He'd need at least an ostrich egg for that," said "old" Gombarov, entering the room at that moment, having got a respite from his posing for Absalom.

"He's slightly deaf, yet he always manages to hear things which are not meant for him," thought John to himself, as he got up from the table and walked into the next room to see Absalom's portrait of his stepfather.

He was astonished at his brother's skill, and the soft, rich tones of the picture soothed him, and made him forget for the moment his irritation with the world.

CHAPTER VI

I

ON Thursday evening, an hour before starting out for the Novikoffs, John Gombarov carefully surveyed himself in the mirror. He had an artist's black tie on, as well as his new felt hat; he picked a black one with a rather broad brim, to distinguish it from the felt hats at large.

"Not so bad," he thought, laboriously arranging the bow of his tie. He had previously received a course of instruction from Raya in the tying of the bow.

"If my hair were only longer!" he said to himself. He ran his fingers through his hair and pulled them upward, as if he thought they were of india-rubber and would stretch.

He exposed himself to the mirror in every possible angle, all the while keeping up a monologue.

His long, wearying scrutiny resulted in the end in an exaggeration of his features, an effect still further accentuated by a peculiarly malicious mirror, which, assuming the attitude of a common scold, appeared to be saying:

"You pie-faced mutt! You are a mistake, you are a lamentable error. Your face is green and yellow, and it would be well if you sent your nose to the wash that it might shrink. Your front view is all curves, your profile all angles. If I were in your place, I'd take myself back to the exchange-counter, and say that what you wanted was a face, not a mug. Smile, damn you, smile! For the love of God! not like that. You'd scare away the crows with a smile like that; and you want to go and see someone's sister! It's a wonder your own sister looks at you, really! There, you'd better look sad; at least you look more natural, which isn't saying much. As I've heard someone say: 'When I see your face I begin to doubt the existence of God.'"

If the mirror didn't say exactly those words, that at any rate was its speechless attitude. What could be expected of a mirror bought at a second-hand shop from a Jew? Nevertheless, John was credulous, and accepted the mirror as truth, just as some people accept many absurd novels as truth, never thinking that the mirrors their authors had held up to nature were convex and concave and not a little cracked, to boot. As a matter of fact, John was not at all a bad-looking young man, and he had the habit, common to many, of running himself down; especially when someone else gave him the cue. And that mirror was an excellent prompter. If some noted beauty had gazed at herself in it, she would have had the shock of her life and would have been ready to greet a Notre Dame gargoyle as a long-lost brother.

Nevertheless, no man, at all events no young man, is so poor that he doesn't entertain some hope in the most secret recesses of his being. The great thing, thought John, is that he must contrive to look noble. After all, he hadn't read modern novels for nothing. The heroine, he had noted, was in almost every instance physically attractive; and while it was true that some of the heroes were physically Apollos, with wavy hair and blue eyes, and divinely eloquent, there were not a few, especially in the Russian novels, who were quite ugly, morose, and silent; and one author went so far as to make his hero an epileptic and an idiot. Yet two most beautiful women were in love with him. Of course Mishkin was a prince; that made a difference. Women, he learnt from books, were strange, indefinable creatures,

who had their own standards of judgment; and where men saw a rogue or a good-for-nothing in a fellow-man, women detected a hero and a god in him. And having taken it for granted that he was an ugly fool and a good-for-nothing, and that Novikoff's sister, whom he had not seen, was beautiful and wise, he made deductions which would have done credit to a professor of logic, and derived hopes therefrom which, as the saying goes, "would have made a horse laugh."

"You ugly duckling . . ." the mirror taunted him.

John smiled to himself. In his imagination he saw two white slender arms reaching out towards him.

"What an idiot I am!" he murmured to himself. "And I haven't even seen her."

He rested his head on his left hand, and looked intently into the mirror.

"I will look like this," he continued his monologue, "dreamily into the distance. I'm not so good in profile." And he stopped to wonder why it was that he had one kind of profile and another kind of front face, and why it was that the two did not appear to be on speaking terms. He had heard it said that one was born with one's profile and that one made one's front view: was there any truth in the theory? If there was, he was born a scamp trying to be a goody-goody; a fallen devil, as it were, aspiring towards the angels. That clash of two forces in him—was it not that which made him different, and which gave that strange, tormented expression to his face, as of two hostile beings contending for the possession of his soul and body? He had not formulated this thought clearly to himself; he had hardly as much as suspected the nature of the clash, being but a child in many things, in spite of his experienced hardship. The two faces puzzled him. One was clear enough in its way: a thinly crusted mask of benignity and pity, hinting at torture; the other was wholly enigmatical, a stark profile in an unfinished canvas, aggressively modelled, with a touch of the sinister: overlapped, as it were, by a half-mask.

"You ugly duckling . . ." the mirror taunted him.

He barely smiled.

"There . . . that's better," he thought, assuming a three-quarter view, seeing himself at an angle where the two contending expressions half blended, half merged in one another. "Yes, that's better," he repeated.

His deep-set eyes, with their dark, clearly defined eyebrows, appeared to advantage; while the angular line of his face, from forehead to chin, came tapering downward with unwavering precision.

Once he had settled the problem of how he would hold up his head, he suddenly thought that he was likely to be called upon to speak. This prospect always frightened him. Although he had somewhat improved in the course of the past few years, his speech had one very marked peculiarity, a result of his companionless life in the Russian woods, and that was to make a sudden pause in the middle of even the most impetuous sentence, as if he had lost the train of his thought, or was at a loss for the right word; which predicament would cause him to blush and stammer, much to the amusement, so he thought, of his listeners and partners in an argument. He was, as it were, a tree, which rustled at a sudden gust of wind, and stopped as suddenly. When he was in the presence of a young woman, which was rare, this did not occur; for the simple reason that he had no occasion for finishing a sentence he had not begun. The presence of an attractive girl made him palpably conscious of her attractions, which evoked in him a manly response, leaving his mind a blank and his body a trembling victim to his repressed emotions. The ease of other young men in the same circumstances aroused his envy; and the sight of a young man putting his arm around a girl's waist and dancing with her aroused feelings in him akin to jealousy. He had blamed his parents for that. It was they who had withheld him from life. The others had been taught early, he reflected. After all, that was the whole difference; and it was this difference which separated him from his fellows. He was a mere child, compared to them, in some things. The things he wanted, the most normal things of life, could be acquired now only with greatest difficulty.

Yes, he would be called upon to speak at the Novikoffs. He realised, too, that having left school at thirteen, his education was desultory, consisting mostly of what he had been able to pick up himself, in one fashion or another, whether from conversations he had heard or books he had read, chosen at random.

II

At the thought that he must speak, he became, as it were, a schoolboy who, going to the exams, had suddenly thought of running through his lessons. Still gazing into the mirror, he sought for words; he wanted to see how he appeared when he spoke, of what expressions his face was capable, and whether these expressions detracted from or added to his face in repose. But words had a way of not coming when he wanted them; they seemed hardly less shy than himself.

He tried to imagine that he was holding a conversation with someone; still the words would not come. Vexed with himself, he went on uttering the most meaningless phrases, having no connection with one another; in fact, sheer nonsense; merely to hear himself speak, to see his lips move, to see the eyes answer the movement of the lips. He was not blind to his own absurdity. His one-sided conversation was something of this nature:

" Turgenev? Oh, yes, his ' Rudin ' is a magnificent work. . . . What do you think of ' Fathers and Children ' ? "

" On the contrary, I think Bazarov quite the stronger character of the two. In Bazarov Turgenev had intended to draw a character who . . . who . . ."

What John Gombarov had intended to say of Turgenev's intentions concerning Bazarov must be lost to posterity; for he suddenly paused, and wondered what to say next. His spoken thoughts had that way of starting out on a journey, and stopping short, as if suddenly realising that the journey was not worth taking. His words, no less than his thoughts and desires and activities, always encountered that wall of his, which barred progress. He was not strong enough—none realised it more than he—to generate energy, to devise words of radium-like potency which would pierce that wall and allow him to proceed.

Yet, he must speak. He must learn to mouth words. Any kind of words. If only to become acquainted with them, used to them. Words were strangers to him, no less than men and women. Perhaps it were just as well if he recited something, if he repeated words mixed and prepared by others. Still looking into the mirror, he began in a dull voice:

" Life is real, life is earnest . . ."

"Bah!" he exclaimed. . . . He looked ridiculous, reciting those words. His face had no expression whatsoever. Was it his fault, or was it the fault of the words? There was no radium in these words, he reflected, and suddenly recalled the laughter that greeted Longfellow's name at the Shapiros'. He tried to think of those other words he had heard there, Swinburne's words. He had looked them up in the library only the day before, and recalled two lines:

"From the thicket of thorns whence the nightingale calls not,
Could she call, there were never a rose to reply."

He tried to give them the intonation that Malkin gave them, and wondered what it was in them that gave pleasure at the mere sound they produced, without regard to their meaning. He decided that there was radium in them. Then he recalled a line from "The Ballad of Reading Gaol":

"But I never saw a man who looked
So wistfully at the day . . ."

Again he was astonished, as he noted the gleam in his eyes as he uttered these words. There was something in them intimate to him. It was he, John Gombarov himself, who "looked so wistfully at the day"! Then he returned to

"Life is real, life is earnest . . ."

Bah! . . . He concluded that Longfellow knew nothing about life. He felt he had made a discovery, and he gloated in his heart over it. He tried to think of other lines he might recite for practice, but nothing would come to him, except the Declaration of Independence, which he knew by heart. The very thing, he thought, for oratorical practice. He began:

"Whereas all men are born free and equal . . ."

Gazing into the mirror, however, he once more became painfully conscious of his face, which gave the lie to the noble document. If that were true, why, in the name of Beelzebub, was he given a face different from others? Why, through no fault of his own, was he a slave to a

thousand conditions, which hemmed him in and gave him no way out? Not he alone, but all the Gombarovs. And not the Gombarovs alone, but thousands, possibly millions, of others held in subjection by the Chimneys and the voices of their sisters, the factory Sirens? He repeated those words, but his face and voice somehow lacked conviction. Yet the Declaration of Independence was no doubt a noble document; just as the Sermon on the Mount was a noble document; though America did not take heed of one, the world of the other. Was it this eternal contradiction between ideals and hard facts which, upon his reading some noble document dealing with the rights of man and the mercies of God, brought some obstacle to his throat, causing the words to come with a hesitating quaver; with a dull, hollow sound, lacking conviction? Only words like those of the prophet Isaiah, "Hear, O heavens . . ." in the powerful original Hebrew, "*Shim'oo Shomaim* . . ." would issue out of his mouth with a passionate hissing, charged with indignation.

"But that," he reflected, "is not the sort of thing to say to a nice young lady." A nice young lady wanted no flaying with fierce thorns, but a bouquet of soft-petalled words, breathing perfume. He wished he were good at that sort of thing.

III

The clock struck eight. "It's time to go," he said to himself, and took a last survey of himself in the mirror.

"You look as if you were going to see a girl," Raya teased him as he passed through the front room. The others grinned.

"I am not," said John, angrily.

He was intensely annoyed at his family's attitude, which closed all doors to his confidence.

CHAPTER VII

I

THE Novikoffs lived in a large house, in a wide street, in a respectable part of the town. As in every street, the houses were all alike; that is to say, they were all equally large, all of red brick, all had the same number of windows arranged alike; all had a large front door with six marble steps leading up to it; and one attic-window projecting from the gables. The only distinctive mark each house had was the number, which was visible only when the hall was lit up. John often wondered whether men ever made a mistake and got into the wrong house. As a matter of fact only the other day he had read of a half-tipsy man who had been fined by a magistrate for getting into the wrong house, an offence aggravated in the eye of the law by the man getting into the wrong bed as well, which, as luck would have it, happened to be that of a neighbour's wife. John's childish mind failed to understand why the magistrate did not fine the architect or the company owning those houses. This set him thinking droll thoughts. Suppose God had made all human beings alike in appearance, so you couldn't tell one from the other, and they lived in the same houses, what a comedy of errors life would be! and in these ideal circumstances even he, Gombarov, would have a chance in life. "Whereas all men are free and equal . . ." he muttered automatically to himself. But no! On second thoughts it occurred to him that clever men would devise some means of distinguishing one another; they might even brand their bodies with numbers, just as they branded their houses with numbers.

John swore at himself. Would he never cure himself of thinking in this preposterous fashion? On the other hand, he reflected, he had never told his thoughts to anyone: was it not possible that there were others who thought like himself, keeping their thoughts to themselves? As he knew nothing of the thoughts of others, perhaps he was not really so different from them as he thought.

Just then he looked up and caught sight of that interminable row of mirror reflectors—"busybodies"—projecting at the windows of the second storey, with which so many respectable houses in Philadelphia were provided. By means of this excellent device, when the door-bell rang it was possible to tell from the inside whether or not the visitor was welcome. In the latter circumstance, the visitor might ring to his heart's content; be welcome to entertain a suspicion; and, if of an inquiring turn of mind, pass the time speculating as to whether St Peter employed a like device for detecting unwelcome prowlers at the gates of heaven.

The sight, at last, of the Novikoff house broke in upon John's reflections and caused his heart to jump. The front downstairs room was lit up; the tracery of the curtains was outlined against the drawn blinds; the elusive notes of a Chopin Prelude escaped through the slight opening in the window. John listened, and was sad. He lost his courage and, his hand on the door-bell, thought seriously of turning back.

After some slow music, a thousand passionate notes suddenly broke out impetuously, pursuing one another; the piano thundered a crescendo. John pulled the bell with a sharp jerk. The music stopped. The bell rang with a rude clamour which startled him. What would they think of him ringing like that? He shrank within himself, as he sometimes did when he realised that he had spoken too loudly in the presence of others.

"Oh, it's you! Come in," said Harry Novikoff, opening the door.

II

Having deposited John's new felt hat on the rack—John at that moment wishing that men-visitors, like women, might be permitted to wear their hats in the house—Novikoff led him into the front room, which was used as the drawing-room. To his astonishment, the player was not there. But he heard feminine voices and the swish of skirts in the next room.

He examined the room and its furnishings. How different were the surroundings from those of his own house! There was the grand piano, rugs and carpets everywhere, comfortable arm- and Morris chairs, curtains and draperies, ornaments on the marble mantelpiece,

and not a few reproductions of old and new masters on the walls. He rose from his chair to examine the reproductions, Novikoff following him and providing all the comments. Having disposed of Venus de Milo, he found himself gazing in astonishment at Rodin's "Balzac," then incomprehensible to him, and stirring feelings in him he did not understand. Novikoff, seeing him thus engrossed, was about to make a remark, when the door-draperies parted, and a girl appeared. To say John was overcome is to do injustice to his feelings.

He thought her about twenty-three. He could not determine at first sight whether she was dark or light; her complexion was sallow; her brown eyes squinted; her lips were thin; her nose aspired heavenward rather than in the other direction; "otherwise she was all right."

Was it for this, he thought as he looked at her, that he had made all his preparations? Was it for this that he had gone through all his elaborate rehearsal, only to find that the leading-lady had failed him? Why did things happen to him differently than to other people, differently than they happened in books? He cursed himself for a fool and a good-for-nothing for having failed to realise, even after his limited experience, that he was fated to encounter the ironies of life, great and small.

"My sister . . . Mr Gombarov," said Novikoff, introducing them.

They exchanged the usual remarks about the weather. John agreed with her that the weather was good; though, in fact, he was very much inclined to say that it was beastly.

Presently, the door-draperies parted once more; another girl appeared; again John was taken aback by astonishment. Coming after the other, the effect was electric. Her eyes pinned him down as if he were a butterfly, while all of him fluttered in helpless agitation. In short, he stood "transfixed," "rooted to the spot," and experienced all the other emotions inflicted by popular novelists on their "hero" on such occasions. To John that momentary silence seemed an eternity. Novikoff's welcome voice felt like a withdrawing of the pin from his body.

"My sister . . . Mr Gombarov," said Novikoff, introducing them.

III

There was some reason for John's agitation. Though she was far from being a Venus de Milo in perfection of form and feature, she had the most velvety eyes that John had up to that time looked upon (at all events, the most "radio-active," as he had said to himself on his way home that night). Indeed, if the truth be told, though publicly, like many others, he had made a pretence of admiring the famous Venus, privately, like many others, he thought her something of a bore. Lillian Novikoff's features, taken piecemeal, whether one contemplated the small retroussé nose, the outlines of her face—inclined to roundness—the unclassical dimpled chin, were a collection of imperfections; nevertheless, in the *ensemble* the separate features were lost; you looked, as it were, not so much upon a face as upon a mask of feminine expression, a suffused softness in every high-light and shadow. There was something of the sense of a tone-picture in the full-length portrait of her; her black dress, worn out of respect to her father's memory, bounded her fluent slenderness with precision, and emphasised the distinction of the faint olive tint of her face and that of the small shapely hand fingering the immense black coil of hair; above all, her appearance was dominated by her dark, softly gleaming eyes; "subdued flames in deep caverns," as John called them in his own mind, when he had had time to think the matter out. She was of medium stature, and she could not have been over twenty.

At a loss for what to say after they were all seated, John, unconsciously slighting the presence of Lillian's sister, Margaret, turned to Lillian with the question:

"Was it you who played so beautifully when I rang the bell? I stood there listening."

"Yes, it was I who played. But I don't play at all well. Margaret plays much better than I," said Lillian, tactfully calling attention to the presence of her sister. "My brother tells me that you write. What sort of things do you write?"

John was ashamed to confess that his editorial duties included the writing of a London letter, and that occasionally he crossed the Channel, and wrote one from Paris. This astonishing feat he accomplished by having

at his elbow a generous supply of London newspapers, also such essential implements as scissors, paste and brush; and pen and ink, it goes without saying. The procedure usually consisted of making a selection from the cuttings he had made, and by a certain amount of jig-sawing and skilful manipulation of pen, paste and brush, to give the article a plausible continuity. He usually signed the letter with names or initials, varying these, in order to give the impressions of a multiplicity of correspondents. If the article was of especial interest to women, he would sign it " Mary Ann " or " Louise Lancelot," or " Jane Manderville," or some equally plausible name. If the letter happened to be dated from Paris, he would invent some ingenious signature like " Jean Entrecote," or appropriate the name of some Balzacian hero or villain, " Rastignac " or " Vautrin," as the case might be. Upon rare occasions, when he came upon the proper materials in the English papers, he even ventured into such remote places as Moscow or St Petersburg; in which case the correspondence would bear the highly appropriate signature of " Boris Godunoff," " Bogdan Khmelnitsky," or " Piotr Piotrovitch." The real literary touch, however, he saved for the headlines, which he was requested to make " snappy," " catchy," " breezy," with a " punch " in them. This needed some skill, because every line contained an appropriate number of letters, and superfluity or insufficiency put a line as much out of gear as a superfluous or insufficient number of feet in the line of a poem. He achieved some masterpieces of this order:

LADY DIANA
" SOME GIRL "

Dashing Beauty
Takes Up
Archery

Hits Bull's Eye

Miss Novikoff's question, therefore, embarrassed John not a little. He turned his eyes away from her gaze and, fixing them on the ground, stammered out in reply:

" Yes . . . I write. I write stories sometimes. . . . Very bad. I don't get much time. . . . I don't count the

work I do on the *New World*. I'd like to write something that . . ."

He had one of those awkward pauses, usual with him, when his seething thoughts and emotions were quite beyond the capacity of his vocabulary. O for words which were like swift horses! He was tormented by this inability to express himself; he was annoyed at his incapacity being exposed before eyes so velvety in texture. Drops of perspiration were beginning to form round his forehead. " . . . something that . . ." He wanted to say something that would pierce that wall, but he knew he would have to go into a long explanation, for which he was not prepared. It was evident to the others as well that something oppressed him and made it hard for him to express himself. He was vexed, he was angry with himself; and this vexation, this anger, made him reckless, drove him to speech. He ejaculated almost with passion:

" I should like to write something which will pierce walls. Men have built a Chinese wall around themselves, and within this wall they have created an inferno. . . . The wall must be destroyed."

He spoke these words with a vehemence which contrasted strangely with the shrinking timidity with which he began. As if frightened at his own boldness, his words refused to advance, but retreated again in some dark invisible corner of him. A silence, painful for him, followed, during which it seemed to him as if the others were waiting for him to continue. He was conscious of two velvety eyes fixed on him. He was rescued from this predicament by the ringing of the door-bell. His eyes abstractedly followed Lillian's lithe figure going out into the hall. Voices came from the hall, and presently Lillian came in, accompanied by the new visitor, who was introduced as Mr Strogovsky.

IV

Julius Strogovsky was a young man of about nineteen, very tall, six-foot-one at the very least, big hands and feet, broad of shoulder, altogether large-boned, but sparse of flesh. He had long blond, almost colourless hair; his face was extremely pale; his nose broad; his blue eyes, which were far apart, gleamed with a dull

lustre, penetrating at moments. He was a distinctly Slavonic type, though both his parents were Jews. There was something decidedly attractive and sympathetic about his personality.

" Mr Gombarov was just saying that he'd like to write something which would destroy the Chinese wall men have built round themselves," said Lillian.

On hearing his words repeated in that soft voice of Lillian's, John's face flushed. He did not know why they sounded ridiculous to him. Was she trying to expose his presumption?

" If Mr Gombarov is a revolutionary, we two shall get on with one another. I have a deep sympathy for all revolutionaries," said Strogovsky, with a smile. He spoke in a clear, mellifluous voice, which, though unhesitating, pronounced each syllable with loving care, and imparted to his speech a rhythmic flow. " And what may your idea be with regard to that wall; and what, as you see it, is the precise nature of the wall? " asked Strogovsky.

John felt a friendliness, an almost intimate attraction, in the whole manner of the man; and thus encouraged, he propounded the best he could, not without a few awkward pauses, the ideas which had lately taken root in him. He concluded apologetically:

" I am a very poor speaker. I am afraid I have not made myself very clear to you."

" On the contrary, your ideas are very clear to me, even if you don't talk like the professors at the university. Only to-day I nearly split with laughter when Professor Hugo Schwartz, the well-known expert on English literature, put his hands comfortably in his pockets, and said to the class: ' Well, I think Polonius was something of a fool, after all.' You simply felt like taking a gun and asking the professor, as you put it to his nose: ' What did you say about Polonius? ' There is another nincompoop lecturing about ' Faust,' who ignores all of Goethe's ideas and the beauty of the play, and stops every line or so to conjugate a verb."

When the laughter had subsided, Strogovsky went on:

" The fact is, your ideas are quite original and refreshing, and open up infinite possibilities. Much in little! Infinity on a thumb-nail! Splendour in simplicity!"

Strogovsky had a way of breaking his long sentences

with interjections, accompanied by a violent gesture, and sometimes a blow on the table, which caused hostesses to remove gew-gaws out of his way. Incidentally, when he gripped a man's hand he made him squirm with pain. But with the other sex he was infinitely gentle, and on greeting a fair one, he held her hand softly, as if it were a baby's, and lingered unduly over the performance.

"Think of it," he went on. "There are but seven notes in music; yet what an infinite variety of combinations they are capable of; what infinite emotions and shades and half-shades of emotions; what quintessential beauty; when these seven notes are juggled by a Beethoven, a Bach, a Chopin, or the revolutionary Wagner. Then ponder, contemplate and reflect, what a Da Vinci, a Rembrandt, a Velasquez or a Botticelli can do with the seven primal colours, the seven notes of the rainbow; what transcendental tunes, melodies and symphonies for the pleasure and sublimation of man they have created and perpetuated upon canvas and panel, with a material so limited. Then that marvel of marvels, human speech! There are but twenty-six letters in the alphabet. Think of it—a mere twenty-six! You would not think at first sight that these twenty-six signs were capable of being transformed into such an infinity of combinations of words as are contained in our ponderous English dictionaries, and to the making of words there is no end; the language of the Elizabethans is not the language of to-day; the language of America is not the language of England; the language of Tennessee is not the language of New Hampshire; the language of New York not that of Boston. The dictionary is open to all, yet with what a difference! One man sips his words like a connoisseur of wines; another gulps them down like bad beer; a third, as if they were milk-and-water. Think upon the incomparable orchestration of words by Shakespeare, that rich arrangement and design of words sparkling like precious stones; then think upon the insipid treacle poured out on the pages of, say——"

"Longfellow," put in Novikoff quickly.

"Yes, Longfellow, if you like," continued Strogovsky. "Even leaving Shakespeare, who is of the gods, out of the question, what an almost impassable gulf separates, say, Poe from Longfellow. One got drunk and wrote poetry; the other stayed sober and wrote tommy-rot.

The difference?—all the difference which separates the line

'The skies, they were ashen and sober . . .'

from

'Life is real, life is earnest. . . .'

There is another difference: Longfellow is put in the Hall of Fame; the other——"

"In the Hall of Ill Fame," said Gombarov quickly, the quaint thought suddenly striking him.

There was a tremendous outburst of laughter from Strogovsky, who laughed loudly, in a series of strange cackles, almost drowning out the laughter of the others. Gombarov suddenly realised that he had said something funny; also, that it was the first clever thing he had ever said in his life; and that, at last, he had succeeded in making others laugh.

"Excellent! Superb!" exclaimed Strogovsky, enthusiastically. Gombarov's remark put a spoke into his serious mood, and the conversation took on a lighter flavour.

Presently Mrs Novikoff, a small elderly woman, brought in tea and cakes on a tray. The spoons clinked in the glasses, Strogovsky exchanged frivolities with Lillian; Gombarov, vexed, exchanged commonplaces with Margaret.

V

After tea, Lillian sat down and played. Gombarov saw Strogovsky drop into a Morris chair and assume a pose very much like Rodin's "Thinker"—he had subsequently heard Malkin refer to this pose of Strogovsky's as "nature once more copying art." Strogovsky's long straight locks fell over his temples. He looked solemn, almost morose in that tense attitude of his; one would know at once that he was listening to a Chopin, if someone had snapped him with a kodak.

"He is decidedly somebody, and he thinks and expresses himself well. I must cultivate his acquaintance," thought Gombarov to himself. Then he turned his whole attention to watching Lillian. He sat at an angle which permitted him to do this at a vantage.

The shapely ebony grand piano superbly set off Lillian's graces. The harmonious movements of a charming woman's body, as the light fingers danced across the keys;

the uplifting, tilting or drooping of the head; the repose, at moments, of the upraised white neck; the pensiveness of the softly chiselled profile, from the throat upward; all of it, even to the folds of the dress, responding to the melody, merging with it: delights hitherto withheld from Gombarov, who was famished for them, now fascinated him by their loveliness.

The sight of this long-looked-for beauty only intensified his hunger; and his feelings, so long held in leash, broke all bounds and ran amok in a sensuous orgy. The music of Chopin and the music of her body lashed on his thoughts and feelings. Each note was a kiss, at each note their lips melted into one another. He kissed her, undressed her, chased her around a tree. If he could only possess her, be possessed by her! Yet he knew there was no uncleanliness in his thoughts. He had not at that time read Rousseau, but had, none the less, the preposterous romantic longing, doubtless a heritage of the Russian woods, to woo like a Faun. It was only in later years, when looking backward on his ridiculous thoughts, so contrariwise to the superior subtilisations and veneers of civilised life, that he realised that there was nothing so romantic in existence as Nature herself; and that the law-courts and other civilised institutions had been set up chiefly to combat the pernicious influence of the sun and the moon.

That evening, however, his thoughts did not strike him as either ridiculous or romantic; on the contrary, they appeared to him to be both dignified and natural; all the more since they arose spontaneously and had not been derived from books. Later, when he read the ancient books and found in primitive peoples a confirmation of his own mental and emotional vagaries, he kept that knowledge to himself: realising only too well that in Bedlam none appear so mad as the sane. Even then, as he sat there in the Novikoff drawing-room, the same old question had come into his mind: Did not others have the same desires and thoughts as himself? Did they not also conceal them under a tenuous crust of politeness, made up of such flimsy materials as correct machine-made clothes, polite conversation, and like devices? Would not the scratching of this crust reveal another kind of person, more akin to the ancient Greek or Hebrew, or even the savage? Gombarov suddenly glanced at the rapt posture of the morose Strogovsky. Was he too

thinking of Lillian in the same way? His suspicions made him jealous. Yet there it was: that thin crust, strong as a wall of stone, keeping him from the thoughts in Strogovsky's mind, keeping him from . . . Great God, what was he thinking of? . . . The music stopped. There was a momentary silence, broken finally by Strogovsky, who exclaimed:

"*C'est magnifique!* Supreme love-passion, freed from all earthly pettiness and dross! Chopin gets under the very skin of humanity and tears away everything that keeps men from the gods!"

Gombarov thought it was strange. There was something, after all, in what he had been thinking. Strogovsky had echoed his thoughts, expressed them, perhaps, better than he could himself. Yet, did not Strogovsky's words conceal something? Strogovsky was, in fact, thinking at that moment of his love. But it was not Lillian, as Gombarov learnt later.

Gombarov and Strogovsky left together. The Novikoffs asked Gombarov to call again; but it was only Lillian's invitation that interested him. On the way home —they lived in the same neighbourhood—the two young men became better acquainted, and Strogovsky promised to call.

It had been another eventful day for John.

CHAPTER VIII

I

IN the weeks which passed since his encounter with a new world John Gombarov's life underwent significant changes. His old life, it is true, went on as before; but beside this old life, which was all a matter of circumstance, to all appearance as solid and immutable as an oak, a new growth began to send up its blossom, and invisible, as it were under the soil, to contend with the spreading roots of the older, more firmly entrenched tree.

There was no getting away from the facts of his older world. These facts were appallingly simple; but for all their simplicity they were not to be overcome by the professional optimism made fashionable by certain

modern preceptors in our schools and our offices who bear other people's burdens lightly, even cheerfully. Gombarov often marvelled at the cheerfulness of some people. It was true, he had never seen them when something went wrong at their breakfast.

"You take life too seriously," he had often had said to him. "You want to smile more, my boy."

Gombarov had at that time retained enough of his childishness to take the remark seriously, and, as before, at odd moments tried to assume a smile which had no roots in his soul.

Still, there were the facts: his stepfather, his mother, Raya, Dunya, Katya, Absalom, Sonya, Misha, and Margaret, himself: ten definite facts. That is to say, ten human beings, occupying a definite space: a fact of which the Gombarovs were made cognisant each rent-day; ten bodies to clothe, ten mouths to feed; and when you stop to consider that there were but two, at best three, striplings to serve as providers, you might as well admit once and for all that, under similar circumstances, the fat optimism of some of our fleshly Billikins would shrink, shrivel, and contract into scant nothingness; as for their fat smiles, nothing so much as a ghost would remain. It is very well known: flesh smiles; bones, never; though bones have been known to grin. Perhaps you would call it a leer? Well, never mind; it's all the same in the end.

"Let's have a game of knucklebones," said an old Roman Emperor in his dotage. "It's a fine game. Hey there, slave! Bring us some knucklebones, and be sure that they come from the bodies of little children. Those bounce more gaily!" Which only shows that the Roman Emperor would have no cause to be ashamed of his spiritual descendants, the industrial potentates of our time. The game of knucklebones is still a very nice game, and the bones of little children are still to be preferred, not only because they are "bounced" easier but are cheaper!

But this concerns itself with neither laughing flesh nor bare bones, but with bones which have enough skin over them to keep them together. This may be an exaggeration; nevertheless it was quite true that there were no dimpled skins in the Gombarov family. This is not to say that any of the Gombarovs actually went hungry. Need had made Mrs Gombarov an excellent manager.

John was at the time earning seventeen dollars a week. Raya made another seven or eight dollars a week on artificial flowers, aided by the others in the evening on homework. Until about a month ago, Dunya had been giving slight assistance. She had been finishing a long course in a training-school for nurses by being attached to a hospital, and had been sending a portion of her small stipend home. Just as the Gombarovs were waiting to reap the benefit from their sacrifice—for it had been a sacrifice on their part to forgo her former earnings at the loom—something happened: the usual thing that happens to any attractive girl serving as a nurse in a hospital; in short, she and a patient fell in love with one another. This was her second "affair," and rather more serious than the first.

II

John remembered well that evening of a month ago, the evening following the Day of Atonement. This was the one day in the year upon which John ventured into the synagogue and kept the twenty-six-hour fast. God demanded but twenty-four hours, but as the whole fast was abrogated by the defection of a single instant, the pious worshippers gave Him twenty-six hours, just to be on the safe side.

The day before, Dan Malkin, Abe Rozinsky, and Julius Strogovsky called to ask John to a country picnic, at which they were to be joined by the Novikoffs and the Shapiros. The temptation was great—he was thinking of Lillian—but John would not yield.

Said Strogovsky:

"Haven't you gone hungry enough to make up for this one day?"

Then Rozinsky:

"How many sins are there on the Jewish calendar that you must beat your breast for to-morrow?"

"A few dozen or so," replied John.

"I am afraid," said Malkin, laughing, "that the list is incomplete as far as I'm concerned."

"The devil is always inventing new sins," put in Rozinsky.

"But the virtues," added Strogovsky, "have been the same since the Flood, and they are strangely few in number."

"That only proves," replied John, "that good is absolute and eternal."

"Perhaps you can enumerate the virtues, since they are so few," said Malkin. "I confess I am ignorant of them."

John seemed puzzled.

"I suppose," he said at last, "it's keeping the doors closed to the several dozen sins in question."

Malkin was about to reply, when Strogovsky interposed:

"Leave him alone. We can't all be alike. John believes in the Golden Rule. After all, it's a beautiful thing, if one can live up to it."

"But the Golden Rule," remarked Malkin, "is at best a thing of negation. It's sins that make the world go round. Virtues, being eternal, are stationary. But the law of the world is change, constant change. 'Nothing is so constant as change.' It was Huxley said that."

It was precisely the idea of change, that you could not call anything your own, that Gombarov feared and hated, but he could not put his thoughts into words, or even explain why one should fear and hate change. He was about to speak, but refrained.

"Yes, yes," said Strogovsky, "you are perfectly right. Malkin. Behind all change is energy; and energy, at the root, is evil; at least, from the believer's point of view. We call faithfulness a virtue, because it implies eternity; yet it only succeeds in being a virtue by breaking nature's most fundamental law, which is energy. Look at our friend, Timothy Leslie. He began by becoming a Tolstoyan. Then he forsook the life-classes because he considered that looking at a naked woman was evil, inasmuch as, in spite of himself, it stirred his manly energy. . . .

"That's reasoning backwards," said Malkin, laughing. "You see, the energy is there all the time, and energy is neither good nor bad. It will have its way, and that is all. Man is an instrument, nothing more. But you were going to say that as a result of this thwarting, Tim has given up art altogether and is wasting his time, doing nothing, in fact. Mark my words. He'll have to pay for that in the end. For though he may have stopped working, the energy in him is working all the time, working against him, one might say, since he will not use it. His health is already affected. He's thinking of going to a sanatorium."

" Still, there's something to be said for Timothy. For John, too, for that matter. There's something inexpressibly sublime in the aspiration for enduring principles. Frankly, Malkin, intellectually I agree with you; morally I'm altogether on the side of Timothy and John."

" My dear chap," said Malkin, laughing, " there's no morality; there's only intellect. The difference is, you are a romancist, and I am a realist. The distinction is altogether one of golden rules. I am altogether for the American version, golden in the concrete sense of the word: 'Do others—and do them first—if you would not have others do you! ' "

Strogovsky burst into cackles of laughter. As for Gombarov, he assumed a restrained smile, in which was a note of perplexity. To him it was no matter for academic discussion. The smile, immovable, clung there even after Malkin and Strogovsky left. It was a screen for many conflicting emotions.

Malkin, to his mind, was perfectly logical; but if his mind was convinced, his heart was not. Yet there it was: his roots were his heart, and a thought hostile to it tugged, as it were, at the roots, hurting them. Or, to use another image. He was a young tree firmly rooted in the ground: the topmost part of him, as yet slender and flexible, swung with the wind, responded to every movement of the air, a thing exposed to outer forces with which it happened to come in contact. But the heart of him, his roots, were firmly and deeply planted, and remained relatively impervious to all things except stability and affection. An affectionate word was as a drop of water. He liked Strogovsky for that, but he had made friends with Malkin against his first impressions, being prevailed upon by Strogovsky and others, whose faith in Malkin's genius overcame his scruples. Apart from this, his vanity was stirred; he felt flattered by the mere fact that a man so admittedly gifted as Malkin should desire his acquaintance. What he did not know—his limited experience was responsible for his ignorance—was that Malkin, like men of his type, well known in art circles, rather encouraged the adhesion of new individuals to his crowd, on the presumption that they were his disciples. He did but little work: he lived almost wholly in the faith of others. But there was another reason why he encouraged an acquaintance with Gombarov; the reason was—Lillian.

III

Old Gombarov and John went to the synagogue on the eve of the Day of Atonement. That was the one day in the year in which he did not hate his stepfather. He did not merely put his hatred aside, but he actually did not hate him. He was even a little sorry for him. That ancient, wailing chant of *Kol Nidre;* that sobbing oriental symphony which had gathered into itself the distilled essence of centuries-long suffering; which contained the sighing and the groaning of a persecuted people, all reduced to a kind of restrained and immutable beauty: it swallowed his bitterness and resentment: what were these but another tear dropped into that eternal, immeasurable cup, standing on God's altar, spending its precious substance by scenting the air as with some kind of subtle and mystical incense, which, a product of accumulated pain, acts as a purger and purifier of the human spirit. Shrouded in their praying-shawls, the huddled, bowed, bearded figures, their faces half hidden, or plunged into shadows from their hooded head-covering, appeared like the famous half-finished sculptures of Michelangelo; and the chanting which proceeded from them had also that strange, impersonal, sculpturesque quality in which all detail was lost and only the grandeur of the conception was apparent: an almost wordless wail, more clear, more eloquent than a throng of sharply outlined words, uttered with infinite precision and care.

All next day, until the blowing of the ram's horn in the evening, he was in the synagogue; but his stepfather had left somewhat earlier in the day owing to an injury, which rendered him incapable of standing on his feet too long at a stretch. A day in which you neither eat nor drink, and stand almost continually on your feet, is long; and John, too, was tired. Outside thoughts kept obtruding themselves; even while beating his breast as he recounted his sins, committed in thought and in deed, thoughts of the picnic went on recurring to him, and even as he pronounced his abjuration of the sin of "evil inclinations," visions of Lillian all in white rose before him, brought, as it were, into being by the prayer itself!

The thought of Lillian was very much on his mind. He thought the thought of all lovers: How could he live without her? Thoughts of her filled him with infinite

tenderness, dispersed the dense darkness in him; filled the gloomy, musty compartments in him with warmth and light. His imagination dwelling on her dispersed the black carrion-birds and the vultures which pecked at his substance with their sharp, ravenous beaks; it uncaged somewhere deep within, from secret places in heart and mind, flocks of white birds, singing in flight and catching sunlight on their wings. To love, he realised, was to awake in the morning with one and the same thought; to go to bed at night with one and the same thought. It was to awake in the night and to clutch frenziedly at the pillow, or to lie quietly against the pillow as against the cheek of the one you love. It was to undergo a chemical transformation; to feel a dissolution of oneself, a falling away of one's particles and their rushing together again to assume another shape. It was to walk along the street day-dreaming, and to be suddenly pulled up by the foul-mouthed imprecations of a rude driver for not getting quickly enough out of the way. It was to come home in the evening and have your dinner set down before you, and be unable to eat it; yet feel a hunger so intense as to make you want to cry out. It was to sit down, pen in hand, at your work, and to find one face, one dear profile, getting in the way, interjecting itself, capriciously entwining itself into the texture of words. It was to fling oneself down in an armchair, tired from a day's work, yet be suddenly seized with an inexplicable mad energy and pace up and down the room fitfully, or to suddenly put on your overcoat and hat and, slamming the door behind you, to scurry down the monotonous street in long, impetuous strides; perhaps, at last, to find yourself unaccountably in the street in which lived your tender, imperious magnet in petticoats.

IV

Many a time he had thus walked up and down before the house interminably, trying to gather courage, to make up his mind whether to ring or not. The blinds were usually drawn in the evening, and not infrequently stray notes of a Chopin Prelude or Fugue caught his ear and reappeared elusively in his heart, singing his own song. He would find himself conducting a colloquy:

" You have been a frequent visitor in the house of late. What will they think of you? Do they guess the reason

of your visits? You know that when the door is opened to you, you always ask: 'Is Harry in?' when you really want to say: 'Is Lillian in?' You know you're annoyed when Lillian's brother is in. You don't care twopence for Lillian's brother. In fact, there are moments when you dislike him intensely, for no reason at all, except that he happens to be Lillian's brother. And yet, were it not for him, you'd have to give the real excuse for coming; why, if it were not for him, you would not have even met her."

He knew he was a coward. He had not the courage to ring the bell and ask for Lillian. It was not that he had not heard of the proverbs: "All is fair in love and war," "Faint heart never won fair lady," etc., etc., but he had arrived at the absurd idea that, like the proverb, "Honesty is the best policy," all proverbs were written in order to give prim school-mistresses handy sentences for parsing.

His cowardice, as he himself called it, did not proceed wholly from his shyness and inexperience, or from the fact that the "winged words" in his heart beat themselves against the door of the throat and became stammers by the time they reached his tongue. He felt something quite outside himself fettering his mind and limbs.

To begin with, when he called at the Novikoffs, he usually found Malkin there. Malkin had plenty of spare time, while he could only come occasionally. Malkin had besides the admiration of his fellows and the reputation of being a genius. As for words, they came from Malkin's tongue as bountifully as the proverbial manna from the heavens. Dull of comprehension, John was long in deciding whether Malkin called on Lillian or on Harry. But one day, meeting Malkin in the street, he happened to remark that he had just been to the Novikoffs.

"Whom did you see?" asked Malkin in a casual way.

"Lillian," replied John, astonished at the question. He had had time to observe a furtive flame in Malkin's eyes, followed by a shadow.

Several weeks later, on borrowing "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies" from Malkin, who had never been known to part from this, his bible, John found between its pages a poem in Malkin's hand, of which the last line of each stanza read:

"When Lillian and I are one . . ."

If, instead of writing these words, Malkin had thrown a stone from a sling and hit John between the eyes, it could not have produced a more desirable effect as far as Malkin was concerned. Was it an accident, or did Malkin intend this effect?

For the moment he had taken Malkin's declaration for granted. Credulous as always, he took the poem to mean that everything had been settled between Lillian and Malkin.

V

Nevertheless, welcome doubts intruded upon his despair; uncertain shadows began to appear and to dance upon the grey wall of curtain shutting off life.

His inexperience, and consequent lack of confidence, gave him the strange, uncomfortable feeling that good women were unapproachable (he knew that bad women were not worth approaching); this feeling had tied his tongue. To kiss a woman and to tell her that you loved her: was it not equivalent to asking her to share your bed with you? By no effort of mind could he dissociate the words from the act of love. A kiss was a match, and had you applied it to him, he would have gone up in flames, like a haystack. He had heard, of course, of engagements made and broken: he had heard of the same couples being engaged to other people: that meant kisses, and again kisses, always between different people; his being, however, was a citadel which refused entrance to these thoughts, hostile to his. And as a reaction to this latent idealism rooted in his race—for it was men of his race who had first conceived of One God and One Woman, at bottom a corollary idea, as he was to learn later, when as many gods as women attracted him—his imagination ran amok in pursuit of a woman in a jungle, a savage intent on securing his mate by capture. Thus he would have liked to have secured Lillian. The idea of using words: languishing, insinuating, seductive words: not his to use, made him falter, frightened him, as he had no doubt they would have frightened Lillian. As yet he had said nothing to her; he only looked at her out of his deep eyes, and wondered whether she understood.

Lillian undoubtedly liked him; as for loving him, how could she possibly love a good-for-nothing like him?

On the evening of the same day that John discovered Malkin's love-poem between the pages of " The Gentle Art of Making Enemies," impelled by some force which took possession of him, he put on his hat and overcoat, and with a fast stride, which ill became his slender, frail-looking body, covered miles of streets—he hated trolleys —until he came to the one house that held at the time his whole interest in life for him. His hand on the bell faltered a moment; then, as if urged by some invisible string, like a puppet's, his hand suddenly tugged at the bell, and the bell rang with a strange precision, and its ringing appeared to vibrate along the same puppet-like string back to his heart.

Lillian herself opened the door. She was dressed very becomingly in a new costume, which she had made herself; she was a dressmaker by trade and made a handsome income by designing artistic costumes.

" I'm so glad you've come," she said gently. " I'm all alone, and at a loose end. Do come in."

There was warmth in her voice, and she appeared to be so genuinely glad to see him that he, unused to such effusiveness on the part of the other sex, did not know how to meet her greeting. They talked for a while; then, jumping up from her seat, she exclaimed: " Shall I play something for you? " and walked towards the piano.

She sat for some time on the piano-stool, her clasped hands buried between her knees, thinking. As last she exclaimed:

" Shall I play Beethoven's ' A Child on Losing His Penny ' ? "

Without waiting for a reply, she turned with swift grace towards the instrument, and poising her body and arms like some enchanting human marionette, struck the keys of the piano, releasing by her touch hundreds of imprisoned notes, which winged their way in fairy flight and wove, as it were, a net of illusion around Gombarov. Suddenly the music stopped, and Lillian, swinging around, resumed her previous pose, her arms erect, her clasped hands between her knees. Sitting thus, she eyed Gombarov with an intent gaze, disconcerting to him.

" Fancy a great composer," she said at last, " writing on such a petty theme as a child losing a penny."

" The music is not petty; that's the point. After all, it's a tragic thing for a child to lose its penny," observed

John, recalling at that instant his second day as a newsboy, when he lost a dime, his afternoon's earnings. "After all, if Beethoven did not give a title to the composition, one might as easily assume that it was someone crying over his lost youth."

"How I should love to be a child again!" exclaimed Lillian with much feeling.

"I should, too," replied John. "It's much easier to run away from home when you are a child."

"Easier?" laughed Lillian. "Why?"

"Because one doesn't feel one's responsibilities so much."

"You have had an unfortunate childhood. . . . But I didn't have a bad time of it, on the whole. I remember so many things. There was a little boy named like you . . . Johnny I called him. Curiously enough, he looked somewhat like you; or as I imagine you must have looked at his age . . . dark skin . . . grey, luminous eyes . . . and all that . . ."

John flushed during the description.

"That little boy and I were chums," went on Lillian. "We used to—Johnny and I—climb up the cherry-tree together, and sit down on a limb of the tree, Johnny supporting me with his arm all the time, and using the other hand to pluck luscious red cherries, which he put in my mouth. We were a funny pair, we two. . . . But sometimes things did not go so well with us. I must say it was my fault: I used to pick a quarrel with him, and as a result, he would pull at my hair, and I would run home, complaining to Mother: 'Mother, Johnny has pulled my hair!' 'Why do you let him?' Mother would say. 'You are as big as Johnny; besides, you can run away.' 'But I like it, Mother,' I would reply."

"Thump-thump-thump!" went John's heart, in a series of irregular hammer-strokes; but his body remained, as it were, frozen to his chair and his arms limp, unable to seize the longed-for prey which offered itself to him. He was a coward: he hadn't the courage to take the girl in his arms. No! no!—it was not cowardice; it was his accursed mind tortured with doubts: did she want him to take her in his arms, or was she merely teasing him? It was that which held his body and arms as in a vice. He smiled weakly, and he moved slightly forward, his hands open and all a-quiver; but again his courage failed him, and he relapsed, helpless.

"Yes, yes," repeated Lillian, laughing, as if unconscious of the effect she had produced. "I said: 'But I like it, Mother!'"

He knew, or rather felt, he was in a frying-pan, and she was standing over him with a fork, turning him over.

"Thump-thump-thump!" went his heart; but it was like driving nails into him, holding him down.

Without changing her pose, she asked:

"What do you think of Malkin?"

That was adding a little seasoning: putting salt and pepper on him.

"Malkin . . . Malkin . . ." he began—but all the time he was thinking: he was a coward, a fool; he had lost his chance. . . .

The house-bell rang just then. Lillian jumped up, excused herself, and went into the hall to open the door. Presently he heard Lillian and Malkin exchanging greetings; while he still sat there, nailed to his Morris chair, cursing himself inwardly for being a coward and a good-for-nothing: he had lost his chance!

Malkin and Lillian came in, joking with one another. Etiquette made Gombarov rise from his chair, where passion failed. John thought: Perhaps he was right, after all, in not embracing Lillian. She and Malkin were very friendly; she appeared to be delighted to see Malkin. How could she be so glad to see one and the other? Besides, had he embraced her, the ringing of the bell would have interrupted him almost at the first instant. No, no; it was not that . . . he was a coward and a good-for-nothing: he had lost his chance. Every tick-tock of the clock said to him: He had lost his chance! Every heart-beat echoed: "lost his chance!"

Presently Strogovsky came in; it always gave him pleasure to see Strogovsky, who bore to him a kind aspect, lacking all guile.

There was tea; the usual intellectual talk. John was even more silent than usual; the threads of the running conversation were again and again cut for him by the importunate and tormenting thought: He had lost his chance!

Unconsciously the thought struggled in him: it was not his failure to kiss Lillian that mattered—though that was not to be despised—but his failure to act, his failure to exercise his will. He knew . . . for days and days he would be cursing himself, be subject to the most fierce

pangs of remorse. . . . His hands were tense on the arms of his chair, as one sits at the dentist's before having a tooth pulled. He dared not let go. And yet it was too late now; too late to fling himself fiercely upon her, to grip her in his arms, to kiss her fiercely upon her mouth. . . . He was a backwoodsman, a savage beneath his civilised skin—was he so different in this from many other men of our time?—but civilisation paralysed his will, held him as in a dentist's chair; was not dentistry a symbol of civilisation? Was not pulling teeth a purely civilised industry?

The evening passed as in a miserable dream. At eleven o'clock Strogovsky and Gombarov left together. Malkin said he would stay a few minutes longer, which did not add balm to John's frame of mind.

VI

The two walked side by side for some time, and Strogovsky had evidently marked his companion's sullenness, for he suggested:

"Let's go to some café; perhaps there's something you'd like to tell me."

John had never before confided to anyone. The thought that he might confide to anyone was a new one to him. Therefore he thought for some time before answering.

"All right," he said, with a sudden impulse.

Over coffee he told his story in gasps and stammers. interrupted now and then by a particularly loud record on the gramophone, kept going there for the attraction of patrons; while a love-passage from *Tosca*, with its civilised, subtle tenderness, stroked and caressed him to a pitch of maudlin fury, seasoned generously with self-pity. And he had Job himself for comforter.

"Well, well, you were an ass!" said Strogovsky, by way of consolation. "The idea of letting such a chance go by—such a chance! A chance like that may not come again."

This opinion, confirming his own, made John feel a culprit, a criminal. His crestfallen attitude suddenly struck Strogovsky, who hastened to add:

"Of course, personally I sympathise with you; but abstractly—that is, looking from a detached point of view—as a philosopher, your discomfiture is quite logical and inevitable."

"You mean, I deserve what I got—or rather, what I didn't get?"

"Frankly, yes. It is kinder to say yes. Women don't give themselves. You must take them. And remember, you have a formidable rival in Malkin. I like Malkin, but between ourselves, Malkin won't let any scruples interfere with getting what he wants. Another thing let me tell you, strictly in confidence. Malkin is not so sure of Lillian as you may think. In fact, though you may not suspect it, he considers you a dangerous rival. Don't forget: you've got a job; and that nowadays counts for something. The trouble with you is that you are not sure enough of yourself."

"Yes, it's true I've got a job, but all my wages go to the family. And it costs something to support Absalom at Art School."

"Of course, of course; I forgot all that. That in itself is enough to paralyse one's will. Really, when I think of it, you are the most lonely, the most courageous spirit I've ever met!" said Strogovsky with great warmth.

"No, no; I'm a coward and a good-for-nothing," said John, nevertheless encouraged by the other's outburst. "What I can't understand about myself is the strength of my desire, not alone in that, but in all things; and my inability to do anything. I can't talk, I can't write, I can't make love. It's like beating one's head against a wall."

"I dare say it's all a matter of inexperience. You've been kept back by your early life and your family. As a result of your repression, you are immature, quite a child in many ways. And yet there must be something in you; otherwise, I shouldn't be drawn to you. Malkin, too, I know, has a wholesome respect for you."

"I don't understand it. Here I am talking to you, and I feel at ease, and yet once I get into a crowd, something in me shuts up, just like that"—here John closed his fist with a snap—"and not a word will come out. But it's the same when I'm alone with Lillian. All my words stop in my throat, like solids in the neck of a bottle."

"It's shyness. I rather like you for that. You are unspoilt. You can't tell: Lillian may like you just for that."

"It's unpleasant for me. But tell me!" exclaimed

John, as with sudden resolution, which cost him some effort. "How does one make love? I mean, how do civilised beings make love? What does one do? What does one say? This will sound silly to you, I know."

Julius Strogovsky burst into his characteristic series of mirthful cackles.

"Really, you are delightful. I don't know anyone so original as you!"

John felt hurt. He did not know whether to accept his friend's comment as a compliment or not.

"You must contrive to break the ice somehow," said Strogovsky.

"But, how? The ice, you know, may be pretty thick."

"Don't be so logical," and Strogovsky laughed once more. "Say you've asked the young lady you like to the park one cold evening. After you've been walking a little while, and got into a rather lonely part, you suddenly ask: 'Is your hand cold?' and seize her hand at the same time; as it were, to make sure. You needn't hasten to withdraw your hand. She'll do the withdrawing herself, presently. Every self-respecting young lady is supposed to; otherwise, she's not self-respecting. But you must observe carefully the moments she has permitted you to keep hold of her hand. Every additional moment counts. Then, on another evening, you must contrive to repeat the performance; but this time you must keep a firmer grasp on her hand, and not let go; unless, of course, her protests assume a violent form. If you've managed to keep hold of her hand all the while, then you've won, and you may kiss her. . . ."

"But what do you do on a warm evening?"

"Pretend it's cold, you simpleton!" roared Strogovsky, drowning out the sound of Sousa's March on the gramophone. "Or, if it's very warm, get her to read your hand, or pretend to read hers. There are a thousand tricks, and always another one."

"Is, then, everything in this world made up of pretence and lies?"

"Yes, if you like to call it that. Even in the animal world you have snakes and insects and birds assuming the colour of tree-bark and foliage; pretending, as it were, to be part of it. After all, it's done for self-protection. In the case of men and women it merely assumes civilised forms."

" Do you mean to say that Lillian needs to be protected from me, or I from her? "

" You ask embarrassing questions. What I mean to say is that civilisation has instituted seduction, as opposed to violence, in relations between man and woman. That's why experience counts. It takes away the blush from the face of innocence. It incidentally removes the wall which society has placed between man and woman for her protection. Man may no longer pounce upon a woman; he must approach her slowly and craftily."

" But in the end? "

" It's all the same in the end."

" You remember we spoke of walls. Well, it seems to me, we spend so much time fighting walls that there is no time for anything else."

" My friend," said Strogovsky, " what's to be done? We've got to make the best of things as they are, and profit by our experience. For, after all, we pay for it."

" That's true, we pay for it." Gombarov laughed for the first time, remembering something. " When I was a little boy, my mother gave me a penny to buy a banana with. I returned with a huge banana, so that my mother gave me another penny and asked me to get another. Foolishly I took the first banana along with me. I gave the Italian banana-vendor a penny and was about to pick up a banana. But the Italian could not see it that way. ' You gotta one! ' he said. And I could not make him understand that I had paid for that one before. I got back to my mother without the second banana, and got a scolding into the bargain. Yes, I profited by my experience. Ever since then I've never gone to buy a banana, already holding one in my hand."

" Unfortunately, the banana experience won't help one when one goes out to buy apples," said Strogovsky, who then went off into a fit of cackles.

" It's time to go," he said, looking at his watch. " It's nearly two."

Once outside, a contemporary lyric, sung in loud, raucous male voices, struck their ears:

" I don't know why I love you,
But I do—oo—ooh . . ."

Strogovsky again burst into a fit of laughter, in which Gombarov joined.

VII

When John got home, his mother was up, waiting for him. He found her in tears.

"What's the matter, mother? Why aren't you in bed? It's not the first time I've come home late. You know I'm quite all right."

"Isn't daytime good enough, that you must waste your nights walking the streets, or doing God knows what?"

"I only went to the Novikoffs," said John, on the defensive.

"Is there a girl in the house there?"

"Only Novikoff's sisters," said John, trying to appear unconcerned.

"You are yet young . . . there's plenty time to think of marrying."

"Can't I go to see Harry Novikoff without you thinking that I'm going to see his sister?" John felt his strength oozing out of his legs, and a numbness coming on; a feeling he had often got on coming home.

"You know," went on his mother, as if sticking needles into his half-numbed flesh, "there are little ones in the house, and workers few. Not a penny is wasted. . . ."

"Is it my fault that *he* does nothing, and has done nothing but spend our money, and has brought so many children into the world . . .." He never spoke of old Semyon Gombarov as "father," but had a way of always referring to him as "he."

"You always throw that up at me," replied his mother, with a look of pain on her face.

"Besides," said John, "I was at the Novikoffs only until half-past ten. I've been with Julius since."

That did not mend matters.

"With Julius!" said his mother. "I don't like these up-to-date young men. They do nothing but waste their time. He doesn't do a stroke to help his poor parents. And they spending their last drop to put him through college. His sister is dying from consumption from overwork. But Malkin and your other friends are not any better. You all wear big black ties, and think that entitles you to do as you like; to stroll the streets until the early hours of the morning, and what-not! I haven't had a moment's happiness since you put that big black tie on."

"And I haven't had a moment's happiness until I put it on," said John, in an almost colourless voice.

His mother burst into tears again. John went over to console her with his hands; but his heart was dead, and his legs were numb and, as it were, bloodless. He stroked her hair with his hands and repressed his desire to shout. As earlier in the evening, with Lillian, his will was in a state of paralysis. It was strange, he thought, that the two beings he loved most should both produce that effect. Where was the fire, the ennobling influence of love? He wished he were dead.

VIII

He went to his room and got into bed, but he could not sleep for some time. Then dream followed on dream; such absurd dreams, which appeared to have no connection with his life or life in general. One in particular he remembered: it was chaotic and incoherent. He saw a huge bridge projecting itself and lost among the mists of the Atlantic. Rolling walls of water moved against the structure, and hurling themselves upon it cast mountains of spray into the air; and across the bridge, through the active spray, steamed a train at fast speed, at last disappearing. Then, for an instant, he saw a giant shadowy figure on the bridge. He could not see its face, but he knew it was his elder brother, Feodor, whom he had not seen since he was three; yet he knew it was he. He, too, was soon lost in the mist.

He awoke. Daylight was peeping in along the edges of the blind. What was the meaning of the dream? He became aware of voices in the next room. He heard his name mentioned, also that of Julius. He strained his ears. He recognised the voice of the elder Strogovsky, Julius's father; it was a piteous, whining voice. It was saying:

". . . since my boy became acquainted with yours, he has been keeping late hours, spending his nights in cafés and strolling the streets. He came home about three this morning. He said he had been out with your son. We are poor people . . ."

"The complaint is altogether on my side," he heard his mother's voice interrupting Strogovsky's. "He was a model son, a paragon, until he met yours. He's not at all the same boy now. I had meant to come up and see you about it this very day."

His mother opened the door of his room, then closed it again. John pretended he was asleep. For some time he heard their voices, now quiet, now rising and argumentative. His experience the day before, his night with Strogovsky, the coffees he had consumed, and his dreams, had made him hectic and extremely sensitive. The talk in the next room grated on him, as if someone were making rasping sounds with a sharp instrument on a slate. What a prison was the world! With what numberless walls they were trying to shut him in!

He moved his eyes without stirring his head or body, and they suddenly fell upon a green-bound volume, which he was then reading. It was Nietzsche's "Thus Spake Zarathustra." The sight of it gave him courage; and yet he had so much to contend with; much more than was written in that book.

IX

Standing in the synagogue over his prayer-book, all this came back to him; and as he recited that catalogue of sins, the blows he delivered on his breast lost some of their force, grew fainter, finally ceased altogether. He grew oblivious of everything around him; and if the man next to him, instead of beating his breast fiercely, had juggled three golden balls, the insignia of his craft, he would have remained equally oblivious.

He did not know himself. The mystery of life in general, and of his own life in particular, obsessed him. He could not understand the two forces which were in clash within him: the one domestic, peaceful, submissive, full of pity, succumbing to the tears of others, wishing but a quiet corner in which to retire from this noisy and iniquitous world; the other savage, rebellious, fiercely conscious of the adventure of life, fiercely clamorous for life, for conquest, the possession of a woman: the one part of him was an adamant defence, a wall; the other was an enemy making an onslaught on this wall; he was the attacker and the attacked. His spirit was a pendulum swinging between the extremes of action and reaction. He knew that it was this which made him restless, made him unable to sit still and comfortably for two minutes. He had to use all his will power to sit at his desk in the office. But he was not conscious that he was using his will power; but felt it to be a chain fettering him to the desk: a dog to its kennel.

"What is best belongeth to my folk and myself. And if it is not given to us we take it, the best food, the purest sky, the strongest thoughts, the most beautiful women." This thought of Nietzsche's ran rhythmically through his brain, and its echoes reverberated through all his arteries. He did not know about himself, as others did not know about themselves; that he, as they, was being attacked by new thoughts, then in the air, and that in him, as in others, something deep and hidden, overcrusted with generations—nay, centuries—of culture, was responding eagerly to the cry for the resurrection of ancient life, ancient joy.

Dusk had come; the last prayers were said; the *Bal-tkiu* blew the ram's horn, announcing that the fast had ended! Three times the *Bal-tkiu* blew the ram's horn, an ancient instrument, before whose blast the walls of Jericho fell, and at whose blast now John Gombarov received a strange thrill, and a spark kindled in him as of an unconscious memory. The fast had ended!

X

For once, John went home eagerly, to satisfy his passionate hunger; and again, because it was Dunya's evening off from her hospital duties and she would be home with the family. He was always happy to see her, and of late her visits had been rare. However the Gombarovs may have quarrelled among themselves, Dunya was always spared. Even Katya, who was jealous of Dunya's popularity, felt a secret pleasure in her visits, which were tacitly regarded in the nature of a truce. The Gombarovs, as it were, were in a prison; and Dunya was the one ray of sunlight which, on rare days, stole into the cell and dispersed for a little the gloom which had settled upon the household since the days of the second fire, which burnt out Gombarov's uninsured machine-works, upon which he had squandered all his money and efforts. He had over-strained himself in the days when he handled machinery, and his injury, neglected, had grown worse. That and his near-sightedness, presumably, prevented him from seeking physical work. It cannot be said, however, that his efforts to find a mental occupation, such as teaching, were sufficiently strenuous to achieve any practical result. Besides, he had grown slightly deaf. He needed no assistance from the

devil to find excuses for not working. Not that he offered excuses. Far from it. It was a subject upon which he never offered discussion. He tacitly regarded himself the patriarchal head of a small tribe, a position not to be questioned; since it had the moral support of an authority no less than Moses, who said nothing on the subject of parents honouring their children. Be that as it may, "old Gombarov," now about fifty, did not work. Besides, the iniquities of the world needed "showing up"; and he spent his whole time reading books and newspapers, collecting material for his colossal book, which would show that Sodom and Gomorrah were still on the map, under new names. Or he had visitors, scholars like himself, with whom he would discuss such hypothetical questions as to whether Jesus of Nazareth had really existed; if He had, whether He was a Jew; if He was a Jew, whether He had been crucified; if He had been crucified, whether by Jews or by Romans, etc.

It would be an injustice to say that he was not interested in his children. When any of them was out of a job, who else but he should sacrifice his own valuable time to going out among his friends to find him or her a place? He would do as much for a friend; or even for a stranger. He was perfectly equitable in that he made no discrimination between his own children and his step-children. John's interest in art he regarded as "sentimental," and Absalom's art studies as a sheer waste of time. That Absalom went to Art School was wholly due to John's efforts. To this attitude of "old" Gombarov's towards his family there was one exception—Dunya. Towards her, a step-child, he showed a devotion which, regarded in the light of his callousness towards the others, was quite inexplicable. If "the heart of man is a dark forest," then surely in this man's heart, dark and impenetrable, there was one spot open to the sun, one small glade of light, and this was his love of Dunya. At all events, it was thanks to the indefatigable efforts of her stepfather that Dunya was taken from the loom and placed in a training-school for nurses, so that she might have a respectable profession in life. This was no small sacrifice on the part of the Gombarovs; for Dunya's earnings had formerly added considerably to the family exchequer.

After his day in the synagogue John entered the house cheerfully. The first sight that met him was Dunya

sitting in a chair, combing her long, very black hair, which luxuriantly covered her face and shoulders.

"Hello, Dunya!" he cried gladly.

There was no reply. Dunya went on combing her hair, and did not show her face.

"I said, 'Hello, Dunya!'" repeated John.

"Hello," said Dunya faintly, and parted her hair, which made the central portion of the beautiful oval of her face visible. There was a deep flush on her face, and in her eyes a strange burning gleam, such as John had not seen in them before.

There was a silence, during which he regarded her curiously and apprehensively.

"What's the matter, Dunya?" he asked. "What's wrong?"

Dunya threw her hair back and flushed even more deeply, but made no reply.

"What has happened, Dunya?" John insisted.

"Don't ask me," said Dunya. "You'll learn soon enough."

He thought he saw a tear at the corner of one of her eyes. He walked into the next room. Old Gombarov was lying on the bed there, gasping loudly and breaking into an occasional sob. He had never seen his stepfather like this before, and had thought him incapable of it. He was alarmed and mystified. He went into the kitchen, where his mother, assisted by his sisters, was getting the dinner ready. It was so unlike them to be working silently together. He turned from one to the other, but no reply was forthcoming.

"What has happened? Tell me!" he appealed.

He saw Raya taking the plates into the dining-room, and he followed her.

"What's the matter, Raya?"

Raya, the eldest in the family, was about twenty-six now. There was nothing pretty about her, but her heart was gold. Her patience, good-nature and endurance, unappreciated virtues, were meant for some world better than this. To her brother's question she replied:

"Dunya has engaged herself to a young man."

This announcement affected John strangely. It was as if the world had suddenly tumbled about his ears. Dunya engaged! That meant she would have a home of her own and leave them. That also meant that the support the family had expected from her after their sacrifice would

fail them; that the family burdens would fall more heavily on Raya, himself and Katya, his frail half-sister, now in her seventeenth year, and on the look-out for a job. But the main thing was that Dunya would be lost to them. Their one ray of light would be gone. This thought drove even Lillian out of his mind.

"Dunya," he said, walking up to her, "so you are going to leave us?" His voice was reproachful, with just a shade of anger.

"I love him," was all Dunya said.

"Leave her alone," said his mother, who entered the room just then. "She doesn't care for us!"

"I love him," repeated Dunya. "That doesn't prevent me from caring for you."

"If you cared for us . . . you would act differently. You wouldn't tie yourself up with the first man you met! After our sacrifice, too!"

"But, Mother, you haven't seen him. How can you talk like that?"

"Besides," said Mrs Gombarov, "were he the Archangel himself, it wouldn't excuse you from leaving us like this. . . ."

"Mother, who spoke of leaving you? . . . Haven't you yourself once loved, and gone away with Gombarov? And in your case . . ." She was going to say an unkind thing, and restrained herself.

"You were going to say that I left your father. John threw that in my face the other day, and now you. You don't know the sort of man your father was . . ." Here Mrs Gombarov burst into tears, and fell into the nearest chair.

Dunya went over to comfort her. Stroking her hair, she said:

"I didn't mean to hurt you, Mother. But don't you understand? I love him. I love him. I can't let him go. He's coming here to-morrow. Don't be unkind to him. . . ."

"I won't admit him! I shall refuse to speak to him!" exclaimed Mrs Gombarov, rising from her chair and wiping her tears.

The whole house was hostile to Dunya, even John, who forgot at that moment how small, frail Dunya had carried him in her arms to the hospital the time he froze his foot while selling papers. Like the rest of the house, he regarded her action as "immoral." How could they

help themselves? From the cradle they had been taught: "Honour thy father and thy mother . . ." and the thought of their righteousness steeled their hearts against Dunya into a wall.

And poor Dunya sat there in her chair, with her hair down, and wailed her frail cry: "But I love him. I love him. I love him."

XI

The Day of Atonement at the Gombarov house stretched hours beyond the time ordained by God, and only a small party sat down at the table to partake of food after the long fast.

Nevertheless, once he touched food, John ate with great relish. For, when all is said and done, there is no passion like hunger; and once hunger is satisfied, other passions, thriving on its satisfaction, begin to raise their miserable heads. By the time the coffee came, he saw the fairy white figure of Lillian rising from its fumes; thin and vapoury like a genie, it blurred but did not wholly obscure the figure of Dunya.

Old Gombarov did not leave his room. Mrs Gombarov brought his food to him, but he refused it.

That night the Gombarovs went to their beds—beds? No; for the most part mattresses flung on the floor—but not to sleep. The Day of Atonement had passed. The Night of Atonement had come for them; one's eyes, like one's stomach, must have their fast at one time or another; though this was not ordained in God's books.

XII

The next day the duel was renewed: the duel between Moses and Eros, not confined to Jewish households. All day they argued with her, fought with her. Then Dunya's young man came in: they were bound not to like him; they also argued and fought with him. The usual things were said, known the world over, where parental authority holds legally only over "minors."

What of Dunya? Dunya merely beat her frail head against the wall; that is, the real wall, the wall of the house; beat it hard and fiercely. "Biff! Biff! Biff!" you could hear plainly its resounding strokes. "Biff! Biff! Biff!"

"Dunya, stop! What will the neighbours on the other side of the wall think!"

Dunya got up and sat down near an inner wall. What mattered it what wall you chose to beat your head against?

John stood there and looked on. Duty and pity fought for supremacy in him; pity beat its head against the wall in him. What chance had a frail if impulsive thing like pity against a wall, the bricks of which had been laid by one's great-great-great-grandparents?

"Biff! Biff! Biff!" went Dunya's frail head against the wall; against the wall in John's heart as well. "Biff! Biff! Biff!" resounded the echoes of the strokes through the corridors of his mind, through the arteries of his body. But neither wall fell; neither the wall of the house, nor the wall in his heart. Beat, beat, frail head; beat hard, beat fiercely; move the walls to pity, walls made to laugh at pity.

At last they gave up; the Gombarovs ceased trying to prevail upon her.

"Let her do as she likes!" shouted old Gombarov, in the end. "Let her go!" and himself opened the door to let her out: to follow her young man.

Dunya went, shedding many tears before she reached the threshold; and with her seemed to go the last ray of light that at week-ends illumined the dark Gombarov household. A deep gloom settled upon the house; and the Gombarovs walked about, shadows in the gloom; but in the heart of each remained an uncommunicated thought: she would come back! She would come back!

CHAPTER IX

I

THE book of human experience is not a text-book, and the adding of experience is an adding to our instincts rather than to our exact knowledge. After the episode of Dunya's departure a thought as yet unformed, as it were not a full-fledged thought, but a new-born instinct, struggled somewhere deep within John's soul, and it was this: Though you cannot knock down a wall, you can run away from it. The idea had never

occurred to him before, and now Dunya unwittingly had put it into his soul, to germinate there.

And yet he realised that there was too much against him. In spite of his inexperience of the world, he might risk all but for one thing: the economic obstacles. If he only saw his brothers and sisters provided for, then he could face his parents' wrath and sorrow, could face anything. He was a cog in the machine, and he knew that by his absence the whole machine would be dislocated. It made him desperate to feel he was a necessary cog in the machine. Why was he necessary? Would not the machine have to get along without him if he did not exist? But he did exist, and he was a cog. In some way he felt that the whole world was wrong, and he could not understand why it was wrong, why people consented to be cogs in a machine; he never forgot the emotion of hostility he had felt against the Three Chimneys the day he was discharged from the woollen mill; a feeling he always re-experienced at the sight of their brothers dotting the whole land. How proud and erect they stood, these giants, conquerors of the land! How small and frail and helpless he felt in their presence! There was nothing human about them; no hieroglyphic inscriptions to record proud deeds, no figure at the top—a Nelson or a Napoleon—to proclaim the prowess of man. The machine was the conqueror, and it had deposed man from his high place, subjected him to the position of mere provider for her, the feeder of her insatiable bowels; and she befouled the earth with her excrements, and out of her nostrils belched into the clear air her grimy breath, obscuring the sky and its sun and stars.

II

The idea that one could run away knocked on the walls and doors of him; but doubts also. It was not enough to run away; one must also have something to run away for, something to run away to. In Dunya's case, she had run away for love, to love. He loved also, though he was not sure he was loved in return; but besides his love he wanted to be something; an author. Did he have it in him to give up everything for love? There was one thing he realised you cannot give up for love; nowadays it was essential to love; and that was a job: love's bread and meat. Had he the making of an author in him; not merely

a man who wrote books, but one who had something to say in his books? How could he tell? Could he risk giving everything up for something of which he was wholly ignorant? At all events, whether for love or authorship—he was young enough to want both—whether you created babies or books, it came down to a matter of dollars and cents. The thought thwarted all his generous instincts. For wife or Muse, he began to save his spare pennies. He became miserly, knew he was miserly; wherefore he suffered. He used to see Malkin and Novikoff and Strogovsky draw their last pence out of their pockets and treat the crowd to a round of coffees or lagers, and though he often succumbed to his generous instincts, there were moments when he parted with his hard-earned pennies grudgingly. He hated himself for his lack of will power to suppress his generous instincts, and he despised himself equally for his suppression of generosity. For he did not know on which side the truth lay. Must one deny life in order to gain life?

One sin begets another. In order not to spend his money and not appear niggardly, he had to lie to his fellows, to pretend he had no money. But oh, how he longed to turn his pockets inside out and to cry out cheerily: "Have as many drinks as this money will buy!" And next morning he congratulated himself that he had added another dollar to his bank account. His salary had been raised again, and he was now earning twenty dollars a week; though the greater part went to the family, he managed to put something by; it was slow work collecting his ransom.

If he were only sure of himself, sure of his future, sure of becoming a great author, of having something to give to the world, then there was sufficient justification for him to cast adrift from home. Yet how could he tell without trying? He used to walk up and down his room and think of Christ's words:

"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

Or of Emerson's words:

"I shun father and mother and wife and brother, when my genius calls me."

Or of Nietzsche's endless exhortations expressed on almost every page of "Thus Spake Zarathustra."

Here there was sufficient justification; but the faith was lacking: faith in himself, faith in his ability to become an author: one who had something to say. If his ability were only commensurate with his desire! What would Christ or Emerson or Nietzsche have done in his place, in the same obstacles, and with that intense desire in his heart to be something? After all, leaving Christ out of the question, both Emerson and Nietzsche were men of education and means and leisure. Would they have been content in the circumstances merely to save their pennies and wait? It was simply ridiculous.

III

There were other things which fed his doubts and despair. He saw the process of elimination at work among the crowd he had met at the Shapiros' on the fateful day that he had decided to become an author. The crowd had become perceptibly smaller, even in the bare year that he had known it. The passage of artists past the rocks of commerce was a veritable journey past Scylla and Charybdis.

Timothy Leslie, having decided that it was wrong for a man, though he be an artist, to look upon a naked woman, had finally given up art altogether and taken to writing newspaper articles on the need of moral education in the home.

Larry Lawson, another young idealist, a devotee of Michelangelo and Malkin, became engaged to a girl and married her; whereupon he abandoned his hammer and chisel—for he was a sculptor—and went into the kinema business. In the course of many months, at odd moments, usually at week-ends, he had succeeded in half finishing a plaster figure of his wife: a difficult task, owing to the necessity of keeping up with the increasing dimensions of his subject; indeed, his great achievement was a pair of live twins; whereupon the studio was converted into a nursery and Lawson devoted himself with greater ardour than ever to the "movies."

Aaron Fineberg had dreams of succeeding Puvis de Chavannes as a maker of murals; but, the opportunity offering itself, was content with becoming an illustrator. The "Fineberg girl" was beginning to challenge the "Gibson girl" for supremacy.

Jane Lessing, a vivacious girl who was not formally

attached to the crowd, had been seduced by a clergyman's son, and was now in the country, nursing her child and shame. She wrote home: "I have given up art for good. I have decided to become a hospital nurse in the Children's Hospital. I love babies."

Louis Myers, an earnest and promising young painter, finding it necessary to support his aged parents, gave up his art—at any rate, for the time being—and resumed his former occupation, that of printer.

Altogether, it was a case of

> "This little piggie went to market,
> This little piggie stayed at home,
> This little one had all the meat,
> This little one had none,"

as Malkin put it.

John could not take it so lightly. Malkin himself did not appear to work. All sorts of rumours were current about David Shapiro's paintings done in secrecy; but if you questioned the purveyor of the gossip as to whether he had seen Shapiro's paintings, he invariably replied that he hadn't, but that he had got his information from someone whose friend's friend had seen them. Shapiro himself was quite modest, and sometimes complained that he had little money to spend on canvas and paint. The Sunday parties at the Shapiros' went on as before; the names of Rembrandt, Velasquez, Titian and Whistler were audible as before; but the crowd had grown a little smaller; and Malkin himself was not as regular in his visits; he spent most of his time at the Novikoffs'. But at the back of the house, four factory chimneys now looked where three were before, a new wing having been added to the factory. And the stream, robbed of its water, spoke in consequence in less audible tones than before. On week-days, in dry weather, it scantily ran on, thick with refuse and murky with the mingled dyes which came pouring into it through several sluice-ways.

IV

As again he walked along the stream one Sunday evening from the Shapiros', his thoughts intent on the defection of yet another member from the original Shapiro circle, John could not help but feel that there was some intimate connection between this defeat of

humanity and the triumphant erection of these monuments of modern industry. This feeling depressed him and robbed him of initiative.

When he arrived home he found his uncle discussing with his stepfather. Shortly afterwards, the latter left the room, and John, taking advantage of his absence, asked his uncle:

"Hasn't someone invented a machine for measuring the brain, a machine by which it would be possible to tell what one is capable of?"

"No such machine has been invented," replied Uncle Baruch, laughing. "Perhaps it's a good thing that there is no such machine. I am afraid that if there were, there would be an increase in the suicide statistics. Ambitious young men would kill themselves if they found out that they were no good for anything else but machine-fodder."

"But how is one to know," persisted John, "as to whether one was not wasting his time in trying to become an artist, an author, a musician?"

"I suppose one has simply to take one's chances," replied his uncle. "If that was true before, it is even more true in our industrial age. You've never heard of the so-called Law of Chance, have you?"

"No," said John. "What is it?"

"Our present civilisation is practically built on this law," explained Uncle Baruch. "Take insurance, as an example. Expert accountants have figured out that, given a certain congested district, in which live a certain number of people; and that in this district so many trolleys and vehicles pass in the course of the day; then in a given time there would be so many accidents, so many persons killed and so many persons maimed. They strike an average, and taking this average as a basis, they fix the amount of premiums, liabilities, etc. If it's fire insurance, they consider the congestion of the district, the proximity of the houses, the inflammability of the material, the number of the occupants, the quantity and the sort of lighting employed, whether the house be employed for the manufacture of some commodity conducive to fire, etc., etc. Betting on horse races and other forms of gambling are founded on the same Law of Chance. The whole law is a matter of relativity, and the same relativity may be said to enter all human fortunes. Our age is a complex one, and in judging of a life and its prospects a hundred

things have to be considered in relation to each other. Have you ever been to a pebble beach and played with pebbles?"

"No, I've never been to the seashore," replied John sadly.

"Well, if you ever do, try throwing pebbles," said his uncle. "You will have a perfect illustration of what I mean. Watch each pebble carefully as you throw it. One pebble will land among others and simply stay there without making further progress. Another will ricochet backwards and forwards several times, cutting, perhaps, several angles, and half come back to you. A third may bounce a number of times, without once retracing its course, or deviating however slightly. Several factors enter into this. There is, first of all, the shape of the pebble you choose to throw. Then, much depends on what side and what stone it happens to strike first, and what force you employ in throwing. Then, again, the position of the other stones is to be considered, what side they offer to the contact of the thrown stone, what obstacles they offer in the way of resistance. Your throwing may be altogether a matter of chance; but putting this aside, everything else is a matter of absolute mathematical precision. A man's life is the same matter of relativities. It is a pebble thrown by a chance hand and made to come in contact with obstacles, the relation of which to the thrown pebble might be calculated mathematically, if all the factors were known. But they are not known."

"Then, actually, there is no such thing as free will?" asked John, astonished at his uncle's simple way of putting things.

"Strictly speaking, no. People delude themselves with all sorts of ideas. There is no will, but there is energy. Let a very active man will to sit still. That would be a proof of will. But if a man have energy, he is bound to act; and his activity would be commonly but quite erroneously called the exercising of his will. Energy may be suppressed for a time, but when it finally bursts forth, there is no telling what it may do. At best, what men call will is always subject to a greater will. A planet may revolve round itself, yet at the same time it revolves round another planet and is subject to it by laws of gravitation."

This conversation set John thinking. What sort of

pebble was he? What sort of pebbles would it be his fate to come in contact with? He was badly shaped and thrown badly, to start with. Yet who could tell? He had not yet come to the end of his bouncing. He was still ricocheting across life. He felt stubborn, resentful and rebellious. With this, he realised that modern life was infinitely complex. There were enough natural laws to which one was subject and with which one was in eternal conflict, and he could not understand the object of the innumerable laws humanity, especially in this age, had made for itself; and thinking in this connection of his own life and the career upon which he proposed embarking, one simple truth shone clearly in the cobwebby gloom of his existence: one simple truth was his beacon of hope, and it was this:

"Many are called, but few are chosen."

Once he came upon this truth, he took possession of it as if it were his own. On occasions it lit up his whole being; for everything in him strove towards simplicity; while the whole world around him was entangled in bonds of its own making.

"A fish has the whole sea to swim in; an eagle has no limitation of air to fly in, but men—men have built themselves cul-de-sacs." John was never to forget these words of his uncle's.

CHAPTER X

I

SPRING had come again, fretful and wistful, the most capricious of seasons. There was about the earth the sense of change, the sense of pleasure and pain, the sense of conceiving and begetting and of the throes of birth. Early flowers had broken through the crust of the earth and the trees were in virginal blossom, tremulous at every whisper of the ardent air. In the park, the Wissahickon, swollen by many freshets, flowed on with a reticent, even turbulence; and John, walking along its banks, was lost in thoughts of his childhood in the Russian woods. He gave his thought to this by choice. It distressed him to think of other things. The restlessness and ardency of spring always found echoes in his

heart. The spring, made for happy lovers, distressed him; made him even more conscious than usual of the great want in his life. It was more than a want; it was a hunger. Something deep within him, as it were the very roots of him, tugged desperately, a thing famished for sun and water. "To love, and to be loved in return!" This thought was a pendulum which swung between the two extremes of self-pity and fierceness. That was why he hated the spring: he might have loved it, but hated it. He was one with nature in the drizzly, sunless weather: but the spring, stirring his desires without granting a response in another being, caused him to be acutely aware of the emptiness of his life, and consequently of life in general. The thought of himself as again a child in the Russian woods was the one thing which brought forgetfulness. Thus thinking, he sat down on a fallen tree and watched the Wissahickon flowing.

"Hello! What are you doing, dreaming?"

He looked up, startled by Malkin's appearance. Their relations had been somewhat cool of late, although not a word had been said on either side to make them so. There are situations in which words are wasted and silences speak passionately. It was even so with the silence which followed the sudden intrusion upon John's thoughts. The silence throbbed with pain; this pain was reflected in John's face; he had not yet learnt to conceal his emotions; his face was still a face, and not yet a mask: still a revealing and not a concealing device. He could not speak if he wanted to, for there were tears in his throat, and he waited until they should trickle back to the tear-reservoir.

"What's the trouble?" said Malkin, putting a hand on John's shoulder.

"Nothing . . ." replied John sullenly. "I was just thinking. . . ."

Another tense silence followed, again broken by Malkin.

"Let's go to town. Have a coffee with me. I want to talk to you."

There was a new note in Malkin's voice which John had not heard before: a note of intimacy, suggesting the desire to impart a confidence.

"All right!" said John in a more cheerful voice, as he rose from his place. An appeal to the human in him seldom failed to find a response; and before the sorrows

of others his own dispersed as a mist before a strong breeze. He scented that Malkin was in a difficulty.

"Have you written anything lately?" asked Malkin, in order to break the silence as they walked together along the narrow path.

"Not much," replied John, self-reproachfully. "A prose-poem or two—that's all, and not very good at that. As you know, I haven't much time. I've got to be up at five in the morning to do the little I do."

"I'd like to see them," said Malkin.

"I'm afraid they are not fit to be seen," laughed John. "I can only tell you that one begins: 'I am like a wild beast in a menagerie cage . . .' The fact is, I just feel like that, going round and round in a cage, shut in . . ."

"Yes, yes," said Malkin. "One does feel like that. I'd like to see the poem."

"I'm afraid I'm like the rest of the crowd. They are all painting, yet not one will show a thing. I tried my first rhymes the other day, by the way. It's just a joke." John fumbled in his inside coat-pocket and drew out a piece of paper, handing it shamefacedly to Malkin, who read the opening stanza aloud:

> "When Eve the Garden of Eden forsook,
> And with her sinner Adam took,
> A fig she did not care for dress,
> A fig-leaf covered her distress."

Malkin roared with laughter. "I didn't think it was in you," he said. "I don't mean to say there's any poetry in it; there isn't; but there's humour. Knowing you, one would hardly suspect that this is the sort of thing you'd write. 'Pon my word, I didn't think it was in you. If you could develop that side of you, you might write satire."

"I didn't think it was in you"—John was to recall that phrase; for he was fated to hear it often in the future. In truth, he did not know himself; and even petty things he did astonished him, not because they were extraordinary in any way in themselves, but seemed only extraordinary coming from him. He did not know that not many days would elapse before he should recall that phrase.

II

They soon reached the town streets. Spring was in evidence here, as it can be evident only in the streets of a large town. Black mud-banks everywhere, where snow had been before. Pools and puddles of dirty water. Young women lifting their skirts as they cross the street, showing their pretty legs up to their knees; and shapeless old women callously contriving to show theirs above their knees. Equal caution is shown on the sidewalks, where there is danger of last icicles hurling themselves from the roofs upon the heads of the pedestrians and of little jets of water trickling in at the backs of their necks. The face of the city in spring is the face of a chimney-sweep perspiring. Thick though the city's skin is, of cobble and cement, the spring's ardent warmth has broken through and fills the nostrils with new life and new desire.

Malkin and Gombarov covered the rest of the journey by trolley, for it was very warm and the mud of the streets gave one a bedraggled look. Once in the café, two steaming coffees on the table, Malkin plunged into the subject which occupied his mind.

"Lillian and I have broken it off," began Malkin, slowly and deliberately, looking intently at John through half-closed eyes.

John flushed, but said nothing. A little white bird of hope pecked at his heart as inside an egg-shell. Malkin went on:

"We've disagreed about some things. To-night I shall call to return her letters. She has already returned me mine. Last night I threw them one by one into the fire, and watched them burn." As he spoke, Malkin did not remove his eyes from John's face.

John's heart seemed to burst its shell, shook itself, expanded, flapped a pair of wings, as if it were a bird, a phœnix rising from the ashes of Malkin's consumed love-letters. His face ostensibly flaming, he asked faintly:

"What do you intend to do?"

"I? I'm thinking of going to Paris—to dream and to die."

Throughout, Malkin did not change the tone of his voice, nor lift an eyelid. He repeated:

"Yes, to Paris—to dream and to die."

"Why die?" asked John encouragingly, and quite innocently added: "I'm told Paris is the nicest possible place to live in. You've been in Paris before, and so you know the ropes."

"I prefer a bullet," said Malkin, sulkily, thinking that John was jokingly insinuating a means for his self-disposal. He was extremely suspicious of John after the rhymed jest he had read a little while before.

"No, no!" exclaimed John. "I didn't mean that at all. Upon my word, I didn't. I was trying to cheer you up."

Malkin, observing John's earnestness, was appeased. "You know," he said, by way of conciliation, "it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to go to Paris. If you want to write, you ought to have some experience of life."

"I should like to go to London," replied John. "It seems to me every writer of English should go to London. Of course, it's different with you painters. Painting is a universal language, whereas speech is not."

"I dare say you are right. Still, you ought to see Paris. There is no city like Paris."

"And yet," said John, slowly, with a note of hesitation in his voice, "even Paris, lovely as it is supposed to be, may seem sad and empty . . . I mean . . . in certain circumstances . . . and even Philadelphia may seem like heaven . . . if only . . ." John suddenly stopped short, as was sometimes his habit, in the middle of the sentence. This time, however, it was a kind of instinctive caution which made him pause.

"You mean . . ." said Malkin, in order to prompt John, and also paused. At the same time he put an encouraging hand on John's shoulder.

John still hesitated. The thought crossed his mind: Malkin had been frank with him; Malkin had showed his friendliness by telling him what had happened; Malkin had trustfully confided in him; it made him feel ashamed of being cautious and secretive. With sudden resolution he proceeded:

"Well, you know what I mean . . . I don't know whether you know or not . . . but I too have been in love with Lillian. But I have said nothing to her . . . I'm green in such matters . . . I thought she might not like it . . . I thought . . . I thought . . . she was in love

with you. . . . No, it wasn't to see Harry that I came to the house . . ."

He paused. He somehow wished he hadn't said that last sentence. He really liked Harry, but his zeal got the best of him. He hastened to explain, and was interrupted by a sympathetic nod from Malkin:

"I understand . . . I understand. I haven't much use for Harry myself."

It wasn't at all what John had meant to say, but the remark threw him off his guard, and he did not pursue his explanation.

"You and I understand these things," added Malkin, in a friendly tone, which reassured John. The touch of flattery, too, found a response in his famished soul.

They talked friendlily for some time. Never had Malkin opened his heart so before, at least to John, who, before they parted, began to feel that he had misjudged Malkin. Certainly Malkin could be charming when he wanted to.

John went home, elated with his new friendship. He felt sorry for Malkin; at the same time a secret pleasure took possession of him, arising out of the hope that a dangerous rival for Lillian's heart would henceforth remove his presence and leave him a clear field. His heart fluttered at the thought. He decided he would do nothing until Malkin had departed for Paris.

CHAPTER XI

I

FOR some days after his meeting with Malkin, John did not visit the Novikoffs. His confession to Malkin, instead of freeing him, gave him an uncomfortable feeling of self-consciousness, which made it hard for him to face Lillian. There was, besides, the horrible thought that she might know everything, that Malkin had told her. He decided to consult Strogovsky. Life, he was beginning to see, was more and more of a network to catch one: as one sin begot another, so one confession led to several. Nevertheless, there was no help for it: he must see Strogovsky; Strogovsky was the

one man who could help him. He looked him up that very day.

"I know all about it," said Strogovsky. "At all events, I already have Malkin's version. What you tell me puts a new light on the matter. The fact is, my friend, Malkin is intriguing. Between ourselves, I suspect that he is trying to get you out of the way while he is taking a holiday in Paris."

"What makes you think that?" John felt his heart sinking.

"It is very simple. He is harping on your hypocrisy, your remarks about going to see Lillian and not Harry. He calls you Uriah Heep."

"It is he who is Uriah Heep, not I!" exclaimed John, in an outburst of indignation unusual to him. "He came to me with his story about Lillian and burning the letters, and he wanted sympathy, and I gave it to him. As for Harry, Malkin himself said that he had no use for him."

John was stunned. It was his first contact with intrigue. He regarded intrigue as a petty vice, and thought it existed only among petty people: he had thought Malkin an artist; capable, if you like, of grand vices; he had had a clear, uncompromising image of him reciting with passion the unpuritanic lines:

"To say of shame—what is it?
Of virtue—we can miss it;
Of sin—we can but kiss it,
And it's no longer sin."

But this *bourgeois* pettiness he could not understand in Malkin.

"Well, it's a dirty trick; there's no doubt about that," said Strogovsky. "You are altogether too trusting. Altogether too simple. Mind you, I like that in you. I should hate to see you otherwise. Really, it's an extraordinary fact, to see you here, you, a Russian backwoodsman—for the first ten years of one's life are everything in the making of one's character—nor can I ever quite reconcile myself to the idea of your working on an American newspaper. You are—what shall I say?—something in the nature of an anachronism. It's a dirty trick to play on anybody, but to play it on you—I simply can't find words to describe it. There are many things I like about Malkin, and he has a mind, too, very fine at times; but I think I shall have to cut him."

"It was so unnecessary, too!" said John with much feeling. "I had taken it for granted that the thing had been settled, and had left the field practically to himself. There was, besides, the family to think of, and I haven't the right ways with women. All the advantages were on his side. And to play one a trick like that!"

"It simply comes down to this: he wanted to get you out of the way during his absence. He wanted to secure himself, remove every possibility of anything going wrong with his affair. He undoubtedly regarded you as a dangerous rival. I think I told you that before."

He was listening to Strogovsky, and was thinking at the same time. Bitter feelings and harsh thoughts surged to his heart and brain. It was all very well, he thought, to be a Russian backwoodsman, to be a simple, trusting soul, as Strogovsky had put it; but he was sick to death of being that. His one thought was to get even with Malkin. If Life played one tricks, it might also teach him tricks. And he wanted a trick very badly: a trick that he might play on Malkin.

"Look here," he said suddenly; "may I use the information you have given me? I have an appointment with Malkin to-night. I promise not to abuse it."

"What do you propose to do?" asked Strogovsky.

"What do I propose to do? I propose to become an actor to-night, and to act with Malkin as he has acted with me. I shall wear a mask. I shall be what he has called me: Uriah Heep."

Strogovsky went off into a fit of mirthful cackles.

"Now, that *is* interesting! What do you actually propose doing?"

"Make a few more confessions to him."

Again Strogovsky burst into a fit of laughter.

"Well, well, that is an idea," he said at last. "I wish you luck. I take back what I said about your being simple, and all that. . . . After all, there may be a point where subtlety and simplicity meet. And the thing is simple, and logical too. Someone has played you a trick by a piece of acting, and you return in kind. Of course, there is a difference: Malkin did it to gain something; but for you, at best, it is a losing game now. He has gained his object: for, unless you can explain to Harry Novikoff, you have lost admittance to the house, and therefore to Lillian."

"That's true, damn his soul!" exclaimed John, the

import of Malkin's manœuvre dawning upon him anew; then added philosophically: "Well, there's nothing to lose now. But I'll let him know to-night what I think of him, and it won't be with a bludgeon."

"I must confess," said Strogovsky, "I didn't think it was in you."

"To tell you the truth," replied John, "I never thought that I'd come to the point of playing the hypocrite; though I think it's justified in this case."

"I must be off," said Strogovsky, glancing at his watch. "Or I shall miss my class. Good luck to you, my boy! And come and tell me what has happened."

"Well, I must be going to work," said John. "Blast work! I feel more like tramping the streets in fury!"

II

All afternoon Gombarov sat at his desk in the office of the *New World*, experiencing great tension, straining at the leash. Several times he paused at his work and leaned back in his chair to think. It was fortunate for him that his thoughts were of a conflicting nature, and that his depressing thoughts were counteracted by bolder, more courageous thoughts. The recognition of his loss was hardest to bear; and the sense of this loss was not eased by the thought of Lillian in Malkin's arms. Far better if Lillian died, or if he or Malkin died. Murder and suicide were in his heart, a normal mood for a thwarted lover. Other thoughts and feelings counteracted this. There was Strogovsky's remark: "I didn't think it was in you!" which kept recurring in his mind. He remembered these as the very words used by Malkin some days before with regard to his jest in rhyme. They consoled him in a strange way. They hinted at something in him, quite deep in him, which he knew nothing of; and in this hinting, in this hidden mystery of his person, and of potentialities as yet unknown to himself, there was a tiny glimpse of light, which betokened hope. Was not his being a deep, deep well, neglected and unused, yet containing perhaps living water, if but someone took the trouble to sink a pail and draw it up—who knew? He got no help from anyone. He had to do everything himself. As in his childhood, there was no one to tell him anything; there was no affection at home or outside to warm things out of him; there was

no great love on the part of someone to make the world contained in him seethe with the joy of creation; all was clash and rage and helplessness; and he was a lost soul striving against the half-darkness of a tedious grey hell.

The thought of his evening's business with Malkin also engrossed him. At moments it stirred, as it were, volcanoes of malice and devilry—where did these come from?—and excited creative faculties akin to those of an earnest actor bent on playing his part to perfection. He was, frankly, astonished at himself and his devices; he thought of double-edged, cutting things to say, and the things he deemed clever caused him, when his colleagues were out of the room, to laugh outright, in a way that he had heard a stage villain laugh in a melodrama he was sent to "write up" for the paper only a few evenings before. His chief, Mr Clarke, coming into the room unexpectedly, was plainly astonished. He remarked with his usual good-nature:

"Well, that *was* a laugh. Especially for you. What's the joke?"

Luckily, at that moment he was holding a copy of *Judy*, from which he "clipped" jokes for his joke-column. What was worse, he had not come across a joke decent enough to serve as an excuse for so loud an outburst. Thinking more quickly than he had ever thought in his life before, this fact gave him the cue. He replied:

"Joke! What I was laughing at is no joke, but the most miserable effort I have ever seen in *Judy* to make one. Here it is."

"Go away with you," said Mr Clarke, laughing. "On that principle, you could get many laughs out of the paper."

"I do," said John quickly.

He was congratulating himself on his presence of mind in explaining away what appeared to be an awkward situation. He could not help reflecting that a year or two ago such a lie would have troubled his conscience no little. Above all, he was pleased with his dexterity, his triumph over himself. Surely, he was beginning "to get on."

As the time approached for his meeting with Malkin, his feelings underwent a reaction. He was assailed by all sorts of doubts: Malkin was not such a bad fellow; he had exaggerated Malkin's crime; he was as bad as

Malkin himself; he was depriving himself of a possible chance of seeing Lillian. Then, the utter futility of it all—was it worth while? Again, would he be able to act his part well, to exercise the necessary restraint in the circumstances? He had, in fact, stage-fright. Against all these doubts, there was one overpowering feeling: that he had committed himself, that he could not and would not retrace his footsteps; that should he do so he would never be able to look at himself in the glass again; there was rashness and recklessness in this feeling, and absolute indifference to all consequences, however ill.

Hardly had the clock struck eleven than he heard the familiar whistle in the street below. It was Malkin's usual signal announcing his presence. John, looking down into the street from the fourth-storey window, could see him waving his hand under the electric light. John waved his hand in return, and went to the rack to get his hat and coat. His heart thumped with unusual violence.

III

"Hello, John!"

"Hello, Dan!"

All was well. It was necessary to start with the friendliest feelings. Apparently Malkin suspected nothing.

"Come, let's have a lager, Dan. I have already had a couple, but feel like having another."

He invented this lie in order to give the impression that he was slightly under the influence of liquor, and to make his utterances of the evening appear spontaneous rather than calculated. At the same time he had to have a clear head, in order not to say more than he had intended.

"I don't mind if I do," replied Malkin; and they made their way to the nearest saloon.

They drank three glasses of lager each, and talked all the while of diverse topics; John watching Malkin askance throughout. Underneath his calm exterior he still struggled with his doubts. Malkin was very friendly, which made matters both more easy and more difficult. They sat like this for about an hour. Then, getting up, John said:

"I think we had better go; I feel a bit funny. You

see, I had a couple of glasses before I met you. I feel just a wee trifle queer."

"Yes; let's go into the open air," said Malkin, taking John friendlily under the arm.

"Where shall we go?" asked John, once they were in the street.

"Come to my house, and we'll have some tea with lemon," suggested Malkin.

John agreed. He had wanted Malkin to make the proposal, which exactly suited his purpose. "Yes, tea with lemon will do me good. Tea is a good old friend. We Russians may drink beer; but we always go back to tea, the faithful old friend. You are not a bad fellow, Dan. I used to do injustice to you in the old days. But after our last meeting I've come to think you a good fellow. Don't mind me to-night. I feel a bit gay . . ." and to prove his gaiety. he proceeded to recite the opening stanzas of "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," drawing out with peculiar emphasis the lines:

> "But I never saw a man who looked
> So wistfully at the day."

As another evidence of his irresponsible gaiety, he proceeded to chant Swinburne's "Forsaken Garden," hanging heavily on Malkin's arm all the while. Swinburne was regarded by Malkin's crowd as Malkin's own especial property, and no one ever dared to recite him in Malkin's presence. A strange audacity, however, possessed John at the moment; and, stranger still, Malkin made no protest against the sacrilege. John glanced at Malkin's face, which was as imperturbable as a mask. Was he mystified by John's extraordinary behaviour, or did he suspect anything? John did not care at the time. He had by this time got so into the spirit of the thing that he actually began to feel that he was not John Gombarov, but someone else. He was Dan Malkin, and Dan Malkin was John Gombarov. The feeling of being, as it were, someone else, exhilarated him. All his creative faculties, denied a worthier outlet, were at work; he was creating a character—what fun! His own Gombarovian responsibilities were off his shoulders. Though he did not know it, it was the first definite beginning of his mask, designed for protection in civilised society, which later, when he began to see more clearly, appeared to him as a more subtle kind of

jungle, in which the bludgeon was substituted by an infinity of refined but more deadly weapons. He was to look back upon that evening as the memorable occasion when his "real self," trusting and childlike and integral, was covered over with its first masking crust, as a fast-running stream with its first ice; as yet thin, and the clear water still running fast underneath, unmingled with the refuse thrown upon the protecting surface. Again, he was to look upon it as dating the beginning of the wall he had begun to build round himself: a wall, however, not without windows, wherefrom to look out upon life, and not without doors, wherefrom his thoughts might sally forth and wherethrough he might admit the true and the real, to which he was never to become wholly impervious. Nevertheless, though he did not realise all this at the time, yet he felt, even while enacting a rôle so strange to him, that what he was doing had a deep significance; for even then he had the peculiar faculty of analysing his actions and emotions while in the very midst of them and their attendant excitement. He was girding himself for the climax.

"I must be strong! I must be strong!" he was saying fiercely to himself, even as he listened to Malkin's talk, not missing a word of it.

Malkin was saying in languishing tones:

"Yes, yes—to Paris—to dream and to die . . ."

"Do you believe in resurrection, Dan?"

"I? No. I don't believe in all that nonsense. We live only once, and so we had better make the most of it."

"Well, I do," said John. "Not only of Christ, but of rogues as well."

Malkin looked at him curiously, and John hastened to add:

"Yes, I believe I shall live again."

"You've had too much beer; therefore you are sentimental. I can understand what Nietzsche meant by saying the Germans had too much beer in their intellect."

John was in the seventh heaven of delight, but appeared to be aggrieved. "I detest the Germans," he said surlily.

"Come, come. Remember what you said about a glass of tea. It won't be long in coming. We are there now," and they stopped before Malkin's house. Malkin was going through his pockets for the key.

The moment had arrived. John was trembling all over, quite naturally; in a way, it was helpful to his project.

"L-look here, D-dan," he said in a broken voice.

"What's the matter?" asked Malkin, who had by this time found the key.

"I c-can't go into the house with you."

"Why, aren't you feeling well?"

"No, no. It isn't that . . ." John paused in a shame-faced way.

"What is it, then? Out with it!"

"I f-feel ashamed of myself. How can I accept your hospitality . . . in your own house, too! . . . after playing false with you, acting the hypocrite with you? And you acted like a true friend, and trusted me!" John paused and looked downward, turning his eyes away from Malkin. He seemed to be very depressed.

"Come, come," said Malkin; "what have you done? I somehow did not expect that. But now that you have begun, you might as well tell me all that's on your mind. It may not be as bad as you think."

"Oh, it's much worse than you think. I don't know what you'll think of me. You remember your telling me about Lillian. Then I confessed to you that I loved her. I've simply deceived you. I don't love her at all; though it is true that I once thought I did. I simply said things to you in order to draw you out. . . . About Harry, too. I've got the greatest respect and feeling of friendship for Harry . . . but I wanted to know what your own feelings were about him . . . and so I led you on, tried to draw you out, acted the part of . . . well . . . a regular Uriah Heep with you."

Malkin waited for more, but John showed no inclination to continue.

"Why do you tell me all this now?" asked Malkin, in whose mind the mention of Uriah Heep had apparently excited the suspicion that Strogovsky had been talking to John.

"Because you've shown yourself a true friend . . . it was my way of testing you . . . and the way I've treated you was very much on my mind. Wouldn't you feel the same in my place? . . . I mean, if you took advantage of a friend like that . . . a friend, too, who had bared his heart the way you did. . . ."

"It seems to me," said Malkin, "I made a mistake in doing so. Shakespeare was certainly right when he

said that ' familiarity breeds contempt.' But, honestly, I did not expect that of you . . . I didn't think it was in you. . . ."

That last phrase sank for the third time into John's soul. What amazed him most, however, was the way Malkin had kept up his own mask and gave no sign of understanding any of the allusions made to him. Evidently he had still something to learn from Malkin. He made one more rather blunt effort:

" I'm sure, Dan, you would never have done it."

" Forget it, my friend," said Malkin. " You have confessed, and that makes your act less heinous than it might have been. Besides, I really don't mind. It's only on the score of my work that I am sensitive, and I can't allow anyone to hold it in contempt."

" Certainly no one can possibly do that," said John; but he did not take the trouble to add that it was because no one, as far as he knew, had ever seen Malkin's work.

" Come in and have a glass of tea," urged Malkin.

" Perhaps some other evening; not to-night. I feel that I want the air," said John.

They shook hands and parted. John walked slowly away. He heard the door bang, which called forth the response from him:

" Curse him!"

Then he burst into a laugh: an involuntary, automatic laugh. It was not he who laughed, but his mask. It was not an easy matter to drop it all at once. His whole long way home he could not restrain these strange ebulliencies of mirth. It had been really the most entertaining and exhilarating evening he had ever spent in his life. The phrase, " I didn't think it was in you," kept on recurring, feeding his pride. And there was one part of him which, at times detaching itself from his hectic emotions, wondered what there was in his action of that evening, associated as it was with so-called evil, that had such a fascination for him.

IV

Once in his own attic, he plunged his head into a basin of cold water. This had the effect of cooling his thoughts. It suddenly occurred to him: he had lost Lillian for ever, for ever. Even the pleasure of seeing her would be denied him now. But something he did

not know the nature of braced and consoled him. It was true he had lost Lillian: but he had conquered himself, had triumphed over his own goodness. He thought it strange that he should so unequivocally regard hypocrisy's triumph over his natural honesty as a moral victory. How strange was life, with its paradoxes!

Nevertheless, before going to bed, he prayed to God, implored God to condone his sin; and added in a voice of great earnestness, akin to despair:

"And, O God, teach me a few tricks. I have so much to contend against. You know how badly I need them."

V

When he had settled himself in bed, and began to stare with wide-open eyes into the darkness, it suddenly occurred to him that his prayer was ridiculous; whereupon he laughed again and again, like some stage devil. That night he had a dream. He dreamt that two beings were sitting at his bedside: one on either side of him. He could not see their faces, but he felt them sitting there, one on either side of him. They sat there, the two of them, and he felt horribly afraid of both, though one breathed a kind of gentleness from his person and the other was unspeakably horrible; he felt that he was horrible, without being able to see his face. He suddenly felt them clasping hands; and he realised that there was only one person now, and he sitting at the foot of the bed, looking at him. He saw his face plainly now: a strange face, which merely looked at him and showed a desire to speak, but said nothing. He felt himself staring back with a horrible fascination; he felt he must outstare the face more boldly. He fell back on the pillow, awake, staring open-eyed into the darkness. He knew he had driven the face away. He was perspiring fearfully.

VI

The next day, after consultation with Strogovsky, who was greatly amused at John's account of the evening, John wrote the following letter to Malkin:

"Sir,—Circumstances of which you cannot be ignorant compel me to sever my relations with you.

"Our talk last night must have revealed to you that I know something about Uriah Heep. Far be it from me to impugn your authority on the subject of Uriah Heep. 'I thank you, Jew, for teaching me the word.'

"You can go to Paris safely now, and enjoy your well-earned holiday.

"I am,

"Your most humble servant,

"JOHN GOMBAROV."

Malkin did not deign to reply. Instead, he wrote an abusive letter to Strogovsky, who, in Malkin's opinion, was incapable of the ordinary decencies of friendship, etc. Strogovsky retaliated. Some days later, John received a letter from Harry Novikoff, who accused him of taking a mean advantage of his acquaintance. For some days the post was very busy; and it furnished a topic of conversation for the Malkin circle for weeks to come. A half-dozen different versions of the matter reached John's ears; this clearly was not Malkin's fault; for Malkin had really departed for Paris. The whole affair left a very bad taste in John's mouth. That was the conclusion to his idyllic first love.

CHAPTER XII

I

IN due course, Malkin left for Paris. John, still occasionally visiting the Shapiro house, where, a year and a half ago, he had his first introduction to an artist's circle and first enthusiasm for art, sadly noted the changes which had transpired during that time. It was true that the names of great men still punctuated the conversation bountifully; it was a habit, like any other habit; but the circle had visibly thinned out; and the former robust gaiety had diminished to an appearance. The Law of Chance had been working with disastrous effect; it was sad to see the results of the ruthless "processes of elimination." It was not an encouraging thing to mentally tabulate the list of "deserters" and to make a note of the causes of their delinquency. Whether one married, or one's parents were poor, or one brought a

child into the world, or one's nerves had broken down because of trying both to earn a living and paint pictures, it came to the same thing: want of money; and the factory round the corner was always there to take one in. He himself was up at five in the morning in order to try to write short stories: how could one judge those others? Nevertheless, the process frightened him; for in the degree that the efforts of the others furnished him with incentive, so to an equal extent their dropping away discouraged him. Of the whole crowd, he could count the persistent ones on the fingers of one hand.

What troubled him now was Strogovsky's projected departure to Germany. Strogovsky and he had become very much attached to one another since the Malkin affair. Strogovsky was his one friend, one prop, one consolation. Apart from this, he was tormented by the thought that he alone was doomed to remain in his prison; how could one develop in surroundings like his? Malkin, if he liked, could go to Paris; Strogovsky to Berlin; but he . . . the thought maddened him. Strogovsky was going to Berlin, because he decided the University had nothing to teach him in his favourite study, philosophy. He had been "funking" for some months, and reports of this reaching his parents, who made life a burden for him with their reproaches, he had made up his mind to go to the Berlin University. By various devices, chiefly by borrowing, he managed to scrape together some funds for the purpose.

II

Strogovsky's friends gave him a "send-off" in the back room of a ghetto restaurant. John got drunk for the first time in his life, and he button-holed each member of the party in turn, always with the same remark:

"You and I are the only sober fellows in the crowd!"

The others, in truth, were far from sober: each, in turn, got up on the table and proclaimed the name of his particular artistic hero. Abe Rozinsky was waving his arm and shouting:

"Hooray for Honoré de Balzac!"

"Hooray!" went up from the crowd.

"Hooray for Père Goriot!" shouted Rozinsky.

"Hooray!"

"Hooray for Eugénie Grandet!"

"Hooray!"

And so it went on until Rozinsky had exhausted his memory of Balzacian characters.

He was followed by Ben Geltman, a merchant's son, whose hopeless mediocrity was apparent to all, and who was admitted to the circle only because he served as an excellent "butt" for jests when the conversation was lagging. He was attracted to the crowd less by his love for art than his hankering for the life of Bohemia. Actually, he was a poor bohemian. The only one in the crowd who had ample pocket-money, he was very tight with it; very tedious when sober, a couple of drinks were enough to set his tongue going. In this condition he was really, if unconsciously, amusing; though on one occasion he embarrassed Gombarov, who sat next to him at a wedding-party, by repeatedly declaring within the hearing of his neighbours that he could have married the bride himself, but didn't want her because he thought her calves were not fully developed, and she had other defects; which it would be irrelevant to mention here. In short, he was a "hanger-on," such as attaches himself to any artistic group—though, it is true that he entertained the secret ambition of succeeding Henry Irving as the tragic light of the English stage: an ambition which ceased being secret usually after a second drink. He had one other peculiarity: an extravagant admiration for the works of Oscar Wilde. On this occasion he prefaced his admiration for his literary hero by declaring:

"I am a de-dje-nerate. I am . . ."

The crowd roared. "Go on!" someone shouted.

". . . a de-dje-nerate . . ." repeated Geltman. "Hooray for Osh-kar Wilde!"

"Hooray!" shouted the crowd, to encourage him.

"Hoor-ray for Shal-lome!"

"Hooray!" shouted the crowd mockingly.

"Hoor-ray for Go-go-go——" Geltman got badly twisted, but at last managed to blurt out: "go-go-rian Dray!"

"Hooray for Gorian Dray!" repeated the crowd, beside themselves with delight.

These toasts went on indefinitely. When they had exhausted the names of their art heroes, they began to drink each other's health, the name of everyone present being called out in turn.

John was by this time lying on a couch, dead to the

world. He was dimly conscious of the humming of voices, of a kind of blurred buzzing of sounds, which rose and fell, and in some unaccountable way were caught up in the coloured spokes of the equally unaccountable carrousel revolving in his head and finally scattered through the fast flowing arteries of his body. Only once he heard words; only once his memory was awakened; when, unaccountably, from his couch, he found himself joining in the toast:

"Hooray for Gombarov!"

He heard cheers and laughter. He heard nothing more, until he had sobered down slightly and was helped to his feet by someone who was delegated to take him home.

Once in the cul-de-sac, John's companion began fumbling in John's pocket for the house-key.

"Why d-do you stop here?" asked John faintly.

"We are at your house," explained his companion. "Go in quietly, or you'll wake up your family."

"B-but I d-don't want to go in. I want to walk," muttered John in a half-conscious way.

"But you can't go any farther," said the other. "There's a wall there. Do you see?" and he left John to himself for a moment, while he went over to the wall and kicked it. "Do you see? It's a wall!"

"It's true; we can't go any farther," said John, falling in with the idea. "Then it's really there. It's funny your seeing it. I thought I only saw it. I am trying to invent something to de-destroy it. My uncle says it can be done."

"It can be done all right," said John's companion. "As a friend, I wish you luck." And he pushed John through the now open door, and, shutting the door, went his way.

John hugged the familiar banister as he dragged himself upstairs; and he was conscious that every step he made on the uncarpeted stairs sounded as loud as one of Father Zeus's thunderbolts. He had an idea, not justified by facts, that he was waking up the household; the sense of self-protection strong upon him, he made hard, unavailing efforts to soften the effects of his progress. At last, thank God, he was in his room. He flung himself down on the bed in his clothes, and slept.

III

Three days later he went to the station to see Strogovsky off. Besides Julius's parents, there was one other young man there: a painter, Leon Bayliss by name. Although he and John did not meet often, he was Strogovsky's other intimate friend. He was two years younger than John, and had a zest for life which was not decreased by experience. It was he who had conducted John home the other night; for of all the crowd he had the best record of being able to consume spirituous liquors without showing the effects of it.

After the last farewells had been waved to the departing train, Leon turned to John and said in a very quiet, simple way, which, however, did not lack friendly emphasis:

"Shall we see more of each other from now on?"

"I shall be glad . . ." said John.

They ratified the new alliance with a strong handshake.

BOOK II

CIRCE

"Go thy way now to the sty, and couch thee there with the rest of thy company."

—*Odyssey* (Book x).

CHAPTER I

I

JOHN GOMBAROV, sitting at his desk in the office of the *New World*, rang up the 'phone.

"Is that Miss Ethel Revere? . . . This is Mr Gombarov speaking. The Women's Page is going to Press to-night, and we must have your copy as early as possible this afternoon. . . . Yes, five o'clock will do very well, thank you. . . . By the way, Miss Revere, I saw you on Chestnut Street this morning. You passed me by without so much as a nod. You had a dreamy, far-away look in your eyes. . . . Yes, you had." (Gombarov laughed.) "Yes, I like to be noticed . . . especially when the eyes are charming . . . ha, ha! . . . What? you can't hear? . . . I said: Especially when the eyes are charming. . . . I wonder what's wrong with the 'phone . . . I said: Especially when the eyes are charming. . . . No, no, I'm not . . . I never flatter. . . . You won't forget the copy? Good-bye!"

"Damn!" said Gombarov to himself, as he put the receiver on the hook. "Must I go on doing this for ever? They seem to be afraid of me, God knows why. Still, she is very pretty. I must ask her to lunch . . . she is certainly the prettiest contributor we have . . . a peach." He paused, then resumed his colloquy: "I wonder what it is about me that seems to frighten them away. . . . Still, I couldn't have spoken like that three years ago. There seems to be no way of approaching them but to flirt with them. Once you get serious . . . I wonder why they don't want one to be serious. . . ."

Nevertheless, he was pleased with himself. He had progressed. He could not have said that to a girl three years ago; at the time that he had loved Lillian. Lillian had now been married to Malkin for nearly three years. He had not seen her since his rumpus with Malkin; but he knew she had a baby, and that, owing to Malkin's shiftlessness, she had a hard time of it and had lost some of her good looks. It all seemed such a long time ago, and he no longer suffered any regrets on her account.

"I wonder," he said to himself, as his thoughts suddenly reverted to the conversation on the 'phone, "I wonder whether she made me repeat that remark about her eyes on purpose. She seemed to have heard everything else well enough." This thought made him feel uncomfortable: he didn't like having his leg pulled by a girl with such charming eyes. "Damn!" he repeated emphatically.

He returned to his work. It was a sweltering summer day, and two members of the Sunday Supplement staff were away on their holidays. He was the "goat" of the office; that is to say, the brunt of the work fell to him, while others got the credit. What with his own work, his acting as a substitute for others, and the terrible heat, his life in the summer was anything but pleasant. Coatless, his shirt-sleeves rolled up, he sat at his desk and sub-edited contributions for the Useful Page. He had already disposed of "Hints for Mothers," written by a spinster; "Advice to Newly-Weds," by one who had her fourth husband; "How to live on Ten Dollars a Week," by one who had twenty (that is dollars, not husbands), not counting the money she would get for her contribution; and now he was going through a long article on "How to Get and Keep Thin," composed by the fat woman contributor. He used the blue pencil, where the opportunity offered, with malicious pleasure; he applied the advice given in the last-mentioned article to the article itself, which became so slender by the time he had finished with it that its own author would have barely recognised it.

"Well, how is it going?" asked Mr Clarke, coming into the room.

"Splendidly," replied Gombarov. "The Scientific Page is ready for the make-up; the Children's Page is waiting for a cut from the foundry; the Fashions Page is waiting for the leading article, for which I've just

'phoned to Miss Revere; the Comic Page is being stereotyped; the Foreign Page is nearly ready—it only awaits a letter from London, which I'll write presently; I am now at work on the Useful Page—there is only one more article to sub-edit: 'How to Keep Cool in the Summer.'" Gombarov pulled out his handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his face, neck and arms.

"You certainly have done well," said Mr Clarke. "I've been trying to get another rise for you; but the heads think that you're getting enough. What is your wage now?"

"Twenty-five dollars a week," replied Gombarov.

"You see, they argue that you only had four when you started."

"That's true; but you know that there are days in summer, when the other men are taking vacations, I do two and sometimes three men's work."

"I know that," said Mr Clarke. "You are quite indispensable. I don't know what I would do without you. I'll make another try, when I have the chance."

"That's the worst of starting in at the bottom of the ladder, and sticking to the place in which you started," thought Gombarov to himself. "You climb up so many rungs in responsibility and usefulness, but your salary does not climb up with you. If my folk did not need my money, I'd look for a job elsewhere." He looked at his watch. It was half-past two. "I think I'll go out for a bit," he said aloud. "I'm all in."

"Yes, I should if I were you. You mustn't overdo it."

That was one nice thing about his job: Mr Clarke gave him absolutely free rein; and he could go in and out when he pleased, provided there was nothing urgent to do. He put on his black artist's tie and soft felt hat —he refused to have anything to do with a straw hat, which, like the bowler, insisted on keeping its respectable shape—and walked out.

II

Once in the street, he ran into Max Horwitz.

"Hello, John!" exclaimed Horwitz. "I was just coming up to see you."

"Why, what's the trouble, Max?" asked Gombarov, seeing Horwitz's glum face.

"I've just done a foolish thing."

"Is that all? Cheer up! We all do foolish things."

"Wait till you hear. I want your advice."

"Go ahead. I suppose it's a girl."

"How did you guess?"

"You said you'd done a foolish thing, didn't you?"

"Well, listen. You know that girl at the Free Library: the pretty one, you know; the one I've told you about?"

"Yes; last time I met you you told me you were getting on splendidly."

"Yes, I was. At least, so I thought. I've had several talks with her. Well, you know, a man wants to show his strongest side to a woman; and so I talked to her of intellectual things. . . . You know the sort of thing?"

"Naturally. Go on!"

"I thought her intelligent, for she appeared to understand almost everything I told her. So at last I thought I'd write her a letter. I looked up her address in the city directory, and sent off my letter. That was some days ago. Receiving no answer, I went this morning to the library . . . and she gave me the cold shoulder. For some time she wouldn't speak to me, but at last I prevailed upon her to tell me the reason. It appears I addressed the letter to her sister. I suppose I've put my foot in it."

Gombarov tried hard to keep a straight face. If there was anyone to put his foot in it, it was Max Horwitz. That was the only reason, it seemed, why he was given his feet. Usually ready with his sympathy—which was the reason Horwitz came to him—Gombarov felt the matter was too ridiculous; and this sense of the ridiculous gave him the pleasurable consciousness of superiority. It was pleasant, for a change, having someone come to you for advice. His own flirtations, to which he was driven in the hope that they would germinate and develop into

something real and substantial, invariably ended in failure, through no apparent fault of his own; here was at least one person who was a worse hand than he with the other sex; and no one was so poor as he who had no one to crow over. With a feeling, therefore, of superior confidence, he questioned Max:

"And what did you say in your letter?"

"Oh, I just told her how I appreciated her understanding, and that sort of thing."

"And did you say anything of love in it?"

"Not exactly . . . that is . . . you see . . . my plan was to get her to admire my brain first. . . ."

"Ah, I see. . . . Personally, I think it's a fundamental mistake. It's not *your* brain that a woman wants to hear about, but *her* eyes. . . . I've tried the brain stunt myself . . . On the other hand, as the letter was addressed to her sister, perhaps it's just as well. But what do you want to know? You said you wanted my advice."

"What I want to know is what to do now," said Horwitz dejectedly. "You see, she won't talk to me; at least, she's adopted a frigid attitude."

"Why don't you write another letter?—this time to her."

"She asked me never to write to her again."

"That's because she's annoyed with you, quite naturally. But you are a medical student; why don't you adopt the doctor's attitude when the case is hopeless? In other words, an operation. You've put one foot in it; now cut away, before your second foot goes the same way! You see, Max, you've been found out, and once a woman finds you out, the game isn't worth the candle. . . . At all events, keep away for the time being; give her time to cool off."

"Yes, I believe you are right," said Horwitz. "Thanks. I'll try that."

"How are things with you generally?" asked Gombarov.

"I'm sick of medicine. As soon as I get my degree, I'll go in for literature. Others have done it. There is Tchekhov; there is . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know the list," said Gombarov hurriedly. Horwitz was an encyclopædia of erudition, and Gombarov was afraid that he would be held there like the Wedding Guest in "The Ancient Mariner."

Though he felt a certain sympathy for Horwitz, whose uncouth honesty and immense book-knowledge made him amusing and boring by turns, Gombarov had not much faith in his literary possibilities. Horwitz hated the medical profession, yet — perhaps unconsciously — he regarded literature as a branch of the medical science; and he studied men and women by rote; trying to squeeze them all, whether fat, lean or medium, into theoretical moulds he had collected from reading books on psychology. He thought the modern novel was the greatest form of art; and his literary gods were Stendhal and Flaubert; he saw their science, but was blind to their poetry: so that he admired Bourget equally with these. The fact was, he was an incipient Freudian, a true man of an age in which the arts were tending towards the condition of science.

"I must hurry along. I have an appointment," said Gombarov at last. He shook Horwitz's extended hand and, in spite of the heat, walked briskly towards Dock Street, in the neighbourhood of which was the small, cheap restaurant managed by his most intimate friend, Leon Bayliss.

III

Dock Street was by far the most interesting street in Philadelphia. No thanks are due to the respectable architect but to capricious nature. Winding towards the neighbouring Delaware "like a serpent," it took its shape from the fact that originally it had not been a street but a stream, alive with barges and the cries of bargemen. Now that it had been filled in, and become the city's fruit and vegetable market, it was not less alive with drays and draymen, and hawkers, and sailors, and longshoremen. And you smelt the smell of tar, the smell of earth and of vegetables taken from the earth, the smell of oranges and other domestic and tropical fruit: and all these smells, and the colours accompanying the smells, made a symphony whose notes awoke one's ancient nostalgia, an intense desire to wander. And there was a suggestion of London in the architecture, in the quaint Blue Anchor Inn and the rotund structure of the old Stock Exchange, and in the general atmosphere of the place: of London, as a stranger knew it from old engravings. There were days when the breeze blew from the river, and there was

a smell in it of the sea. At that time Gombarov's mind was already turning Londonwards; for his friend Bayliss had been for over a year in London, and the two of them often sat over their coffees until the dawn, talking of London. These talks had slowly built up in him a vision of the great city, where the heart of Shakespeare went on beating; and in this vision he often took refuge from his humdrum life. Even now, as he noted the clocks in the window of the trans-Atlantic telegraphic office, on the way to Bayliss's, he said to himself: "It is twilight in London now."

Bayliss had been a godsend to him. Two years younger than Gombarov, he had an experience of life which, if not as deep, was infinitely more broad, since it included a fair share of pleasures as well as hardships. Of a Hassidic family, he was a true Dionysian and took to the joys of life as a duck to water. To have seen him at a Hassidic wedding, dancing with the rest nature's own wild dance, moved by wine and one's blood, unrestrained by the tame, anæmic measures employed in polite soirées, would have made old Silenus weep with joy, and a latter-day puritan to rattle his acquired teeth with impotent fury. Unrepressed by false conventions, he was a natural man; in him Gombarov saw the expression of that being which in himself remained unexpressed, and struggled hard for expression. There were other admirable traits in Bayliss which drew Gombarov to him. There were his persistent cheerfulness, which never degenerated into optimism; his earthly love of women, which never descended to sentimentality; his fierce energy, which accomplished things quietly and unobtrusively; his loyalty in friendship, which had nothing in it of vampiricism; apart from Malkin, he was the only one of the painter crowd who took more than a passing interest in books; he could express himself intelligently and even wittily. In appearance he was rather short and slightly inclined to stoutness; his face was pale, attractively broad across the grey eyes; he himself would laughingly boast that he had "the front view of Heine and the profile of Savonarola." He usually painted in the morning, and ran the little restaurant for his parents in the afternoon and evening. This restaurant served one very useful purpose: he picked up many a model among the frequenters, who were largely of the vagrant type; a prostitute, a beggar, or a pickpocket—it was all the same

to him. He, perhaps, preferred these to respectable persons; for apart from their more interesting faces, they amused him as they sat by recounting the stories of their lives, in a language decidedly picturesque and as often as not Rabelaisian. Not that he lacked models apart from these. There were his father and mother, Rembrandtesque types; and his brothers and sisters, who took turns at sitting for him; Gombarov, too, was ready to step into the breach in an emergency. When other models were lacking, he painted himself, with the aid of a mirror; or went to the river and painted the docks and the water and the steamers and sail-ships, and the panorama of Camden across the way; in the last resort there was always the samovar, fruit, an empty bottle, an earthen jug, or some other article arranged against a piece of velvet drapery to make a *still-life*.

Altogether, Leon Bayliss was a broad, peculiarly normal yet unconventional type. In those days this sufficiently rare combination seemed a paradox to Gombarov, who had not learnt until later that in our age the so-called sane, healthy type was an exception and not the rule. "A healthy mind in a healthy body" did not mean developing a calf's brain along with one's calves, though there's no denying that a calf's brain may be healthy enough; making, at all events, good eating, if not the sort of thing one would choose for one's regular fare.

In his friend Leon Gombarov felt a deep love of earthliness, a sanctification of things commonly termed profane; it was not for him, a mortal, born of the earth and destined to return to the earth, to despise the earth and its gifts; a true Hassid, he was a true Pagan, and glorified his God for His cornucopian bounty: wine, woman and song. And as the enjoyment of this bounty had been repressed in Gombarov by the peculiar circumstances of his life, he regarded Leon with a friendship one had for one's own soul, and at the same time with a sadness with which a man behind prison bars might regard the free man outside. In those days Leon was Gombarov's rod and staff.

IV

As Gombarov entered the little restaurant, he brushed past Irwin Roney, sometimes called "Mohawk" or "Rain-in-the-Face," because of his resemblance to an

American Indian. He was the Phil May of the crowd, and had a real genius for drawing American street types.

"What's the matter with Rain-in-the-Face?" asked Gombarov, turning to Leon Bayliss, who stood smiling behind the counter. "He hardly said 'hello' to me."

"The usual thing," replied Bayliss.

"You mean, his girl has——"

"Yes. He showed up at the studio with a bunch of flowers. But she wasn't feeling in an angelic mood, and shut the door in his face. Then he came here. If you'll look under the table, you will find the remains of the bouquet."

True enough, there were the large soft petals of violated American beauties, strewn under one of the tables, and they gave the impression of having been subjected to the further humiliation of being trampled upon by irate feet.

Gombarov understood too well the feelings of his friend Roney, to whom he had taken a great liking; nevertheless, he could not help laughing. They had all by this time learnt to laugh at their own and each other's troubles: the developed sense of the ridiculous overcame all decorum.

"I think he's gone off on a drunk now," added Bayliss.

"I wonder what's wrong with all of us," said Gombarov, half seriously, half laughing. "Look at the Turks. One Turk can manage a couple of dozen wives; and here most of us can't manage one girl. Here is Roney getting it in the neck; here is Horwitz making a fool of himself with a girl; here is myself wasting my time in petty flirtations which lead nowhere; only you seem to be able to manage fairly well with women."

"I don't tell them about the moon and the stars; and I remember to tie their shoe-laces when they are undone," said Bayliss, laughing. "You are getting your deserved punishment: you have turned woman into Circe, and she rewards you by turning you into swine. There is no compensation, only retribution, as my friend Marianne Kent would say. By the way, Miss Kent is coming here shortly. I want you to meet her. I've told her about you: you've got something to live up to."

At this point Bayliss delved into his inside coat-pocket, and drawing out a pocket-book searched among the letters. While he was doing this, two letters dropped to the floor. Bayliss laughed as he picked them up.

"Sacred and Profane Love," he observed. "One is from Marianne, the other from Blanche. But here is what I've been looking for." He handed Gombarov a note.

The note, from Julius Strogovsky, stated that his life in Berlin was "a damned sight more interesting than comfortable"; and it implored his two good friends to send him something in the way of "wherewithal."

"I've sent him a fiver quite lately," said Gombarov, whose remark was cut short by the entrance of a pretty girl, loaded down with parcels.

"I want a dozen sandwiches in a bag," she requested, and struggled to get the money out of her purse.

What with the bag of sandwiches added, both her arms were full, and Bayliss hastened from behind the counter to open the door for her. She was barely half across the threshold when Gombarov saw the extraordinary sight of Leon's lips and the girl's meeting in a kiss, after which the girl scurried away, laughing and blushing.

"Who's the girl?" asked Gombarov, amused at the scene. "She's certainly a peach!"

"How should I know who she is?" replied Bayliss. "I've never seen her before."

"You mean to say——" Gombarov, lost in admiration of his friend's audacity, could find no words.

"Mark you," said Bayliss, "she'll come back for more sandwiches."

"Well, you are a——" Again Gombarov was at a loss for words to express his admiration.

"A narrow escape," whispered Bayliss hurriedly. "Here comes Marianne herself!"

V

"Hello, Leon!"

"Hello, Marianne! Here is my friend John, whom I spoke to you of."

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr John," said Marianne, putting a peculiar emphasis on his name. She hastened to explain, as they shook hands: "You see, Leon always refers to you as John: it's John this, and John that; so it has never occurred to me that you had any surname at all."

"I feel flattered, Miss Marianne. Tit for tat, you know."

"I don't mind. You've had an excellent testimonial from Leon."

"You, too, for that matter. Not that you need any."

"Thanks. I didn't expect that. Leon told me you were shy."

"You see, I owe it to you that I've found my tongue."

"Thanks again! I think Leon has libelled you."

They all laughed. Gombarov was quite pleased with himself. Marianne also seemed pleased with him.

Marianne was a graceful, pale-faced girl, with light brown hair; her eyes were a deep brown, liquidly luminous; their soft gleam bespoke a nature half-curious, half-audacious. Of medium height, her extreme grace and slenderness made her appear tall. Her small, well-shaped ankles put the final mark on several generations of gentle breeding. As she sat there, white-stockinged, in her white summer dress, one knee over the other, she hastily pulled down her dress over her ankles every time John's or Leon's eyes strayed admiringly to them; and each time the dress was not long in resuming its former higher level. Gombarov had noticed that all women did that. Bayliss, with his usual frankness, observed:

"You're a prude, Marianne."

"Yes," replied Marianne, "I dare say I've got a Puritan streak in me. That's what comes of having had an ancestor come over on the *Mayflower*."

"The *Mayflower* has much to answer for," said Bayliss.

Marianne grimaced, and stuck out her tongue.

This badinage went on for some time, and developed into a discussion of such topics as love, pessimism and æsthetics. Marianne was a pessimist. Her favourite philosopher was Schopenhauer, and her favourite essay by this author the one on "Women." Naturally, she was attracted to men, and she had a host of admirers. For an American girl, she had a considerable measure of experience short of the final. This experience had been gathered in the insatiable quest for romance in a drab world; and, like all experience, it had the effect of creating a larger appetite for experience. This unceasing quest had the additional effect of driving her, much to her parents' disgust, into the company of Jews and other detested foreigners: was she not a "scion of American aristocracy"?

"They are such boys," she remarked on the subject of

American men. "They are only good for one night stands."

"What do you mean?" asked John.

Marianne laughed. "Well, you know," she said, "the travelling shows that stop for a night here and for a night there, because of their inability to draw longer. A love affair that lasts a short time I call a one night stand. It is so disappointing," she added, "to meet an Apollo, and to find that his sole topic of conversation is baseball, and is prepared to recite 'Casey at the Bat' on all occasions."

"Still, there are exceptions," said Bayliss.

"To be sure there are," replied Marianne. "We had a regular high-brow at the house the other day who, in the course of conversation, remarked: '"A rag, and a bone, and a hank of hair," as Byron said.' Can you beat that?"

"You mean to say," said Gombarov, "that these young men have no ideals?"

"No, no, I don't mean that at all. If anything, they have too many—of a sort. They are sickly sentimental about a girl. They sugarcoat her and put her on a pedestal. Then, if she acts her part, and looks coldly at the little lay figures at her feet, they are deeply disappointed. One can understand that about very young men; but older men, who ought to know better, are almost as simple. Still, older men are preferable, for some of them have had experience; and only men of experience know how to love. For, when all is said and done, ideals are no more than the wild oats of experience."

"I quite agree with you, Marianne," said Bayliss. "But John here still insists on taking ideals and love too seriously. He argues with me by the hour about it."

"That's quite true," began John in his own defence; "but, after all, my own opinion is that nowadays men hide their true feelings, are afraid to love——"

"You can't really blame them," laughed Marianne. "The poor things are apt to be sued by their goddesses for breach of promise."

"That rather contradicts your theory of there being no compensation, but only retribution," remarked Bayliss. "At all events, there is compensation for the woman, retribution for the man."

"Leon tells me you're a pessimist," put in Gombarov.

"If to suffer ennui is to be a pessimist, then I am one," said Marianne. "I don't seem to see any use in anything. Life seems to be aimless. To do anything requires effort. One feels like lying under the proverbial fig tree and have a fig drop into one's mouth."

"If I were in your place, I should eat only the patent pre-digested foods," suggested Gombarov. "They'd save the trouble of chewing and digesting. A real food for the pessimist."

Gombarov was pleased to have provoked a laugh, whereupon Bayliss observed:

"I should say that these foods are responsible for a good many pessimists. One must have good teeth to get a good grip on life, and teeth develop only with use."

"I have good teeth, thank you," said Marianne, with an injured air.

"You have very pretty ones, but don't thank me," returned Bayliss. "And it's not enough to have good teeth. One must learn how and on what to use them. There are the pale vegetarians whose one joy in life is to eat vegetables. Salad oil runs in their veins. The only thing capable of seducing them is a many-petticoated cabbage."

"Well, you have drawn a picture," said Marianne, who, turning to Gombarov, went on to explain: "Leon alludes to the fact that when I'm with him I usually prefer an omelette to a chop."

"But an egg is not a vegetable," argued Gombarov. "Poor Timothy Leslie—he was at the Art School before your day—refused to eat even an egg, on the ground that the young cocks were killed off for meat and the one left in charge of the barnyard was under the obligation of committing adultery."

"You've invented that story," said Marianne.

"Upon my word, I haven't," replied Gombarov. "There's my own brother, Absalom. He turned vegetarian lately, and he refuses to have anything to do with an egg, on the grounds of humanity. He thinks that to eat an egg is to kill an incipient chicken."

"Tell me about your brother," said Marianne, while Bayliss was attending a customer. "I've heard about him. Leon speaks very highly of his painting."

"Yes, he was getting on beautifully, until he got interested in the books I've collected. He's got so wrapped up in them, particularly in Marcus Aurelius and one or

two modern philosophers, that he's actually painted very little lately. I've been worried about him. He appears to have lost his energy since he has taken to vegetarianism. You can understand my strong feelings on the subject. As for pessimism, he's the last word."

"Worse than me?" asked Marianne.

"There is no comparison. You are merely dissatisfied; but he's a real pessimist. That is to say, you are still capable of enjoying life if the opportunity offers itself; but Absalom thinks that the world is fundamentally wrong, and that God made a bad job of it."

"What is the way out?"

"There are two ways for a pessimist to express himself: one by means of a small piece of steel, the other, a large piece of steel: a pen or a gun. And I'm not sure that in this case the gun is not mightier than the pen. After all, Schopenhauer must have experienced a great joy, a great gloating, in expressing his pessimism. As Nietzsche says somewhere: 'Many a man has spent a comfortable night thinking of suicide.' I myself have lain awake nights, thinking out a choice of weapons for making an exit."

"I know exactly what you mean. I remember reading a translation of a Chekhov story, in which a man goes into a shop to buy a revolver for putting an end to himself, and after being shown various makes, leaves the shop with a mouse-trap or some similar instrument."

"Well, you're a nice pair, discussing philosophy on a hot day," said Bayliss, who had rejoined them.

"I must be going," said Gombarov, looking at his watch. "There's work waiting for me at the office." He was thinking that Miss Revere might be coming in with her copy. Before leaving, he and Marianne exchanged addresses.

VI

"Damn!" said Gombarov, sitting at his desk at the *New World*, as a boy came in with a large envelope addressed to him. Miss Revere, instead of coming herself, had sent her manuscript by messenger.

"Damn!" he repeated, and gnashed his teeth.

CHAPTER II

I

"IT is midnight in London now," murmured John Gombarov to himself, as he passed the clocks of the Cable Company, on his way home one evening. The thought of London kept him alive; the mere word LONDON acted as an anodyne to his distracted spirit. When did he first begin to think of London? He did not know. Why London, and not another place? He could not answer. Almost everyone else he knew wanted to go to Paris; the warm, the sunny, the gay, the temperamental, the bohemian, the coquettish, the artist-loving; the puritan's hell, the sensualist's paradise. As for London, there was the inevitable shrug of the shoulders. Oh, yes! very nice for a week or two was London: the immense, the sprawling, the grey, the foggy, the infinitely gloomy; with its melancholy Thames, embosoming the bodies of suicides; the harsh, the cruel, the non-welcoming, the squalid with commerce and poverty, the reeking with servility and snobbery; the place of innumerable doors all closed to the poor artist. For a stranger, with talent and no money, to go to live in such a place—what madness! "Not for mine, thank you!" as the American saying goes. There were moments, it was true, when this attitude of the knowing ones caused him some perturbation. Who was he, what talents had he, where was his equipment for trying conclusions with that distant, immense island ogre? He had never been away from home except for his holidays; he had been at the *New World* for ten years; his literary efforts had not received encouragement from editors; only the other day he had had a story rejected for the seventeenth time. The editor wrote: "We were so much impressed by the tragic story you have sent us that we should like to see something more cheerful from your pen." It slowly dawned on him that what the public—at all events, the public represented by the editors—objected to was the truth; they wanted fairy-tales, which had the appearance of truth, or rather, of reality. They wanted stories about Tom, Dick and Harry, and about Mabel, Susie and

Maggie, in which these personages could appear as Prince Charming, Knight Dauntless and Lochinvar, and as Princess Delicia, Lady Enchanting and Guinevere. It was the fault of his frail imagination, no doubt, that he could not conceive of Lochinvar as a young successful business man, and of Lady Godiva as chewing gum. The incredible ugliness of modern life, dominated by millions of smoky chimneys—why did men fail to see it? But the few seeing ones were driven to become preachers instead of pure artists. Beauty in itself was not enough, as in the days when the world was submerged in beauty. On the one hand, his mind was irresistibly drawn by the pagan idea of art for art's sake; on the other, there was the counter-attraction of the social idea, Hebraic in its roots. His senses and his reason tore him in opposite directions; adding yet another clash to the various clashes in him. Only in art criticism he found self-expression acceptable to editors; for by this time his instincts for the beautiful, deepened by his associations with the art world, have given him a measurable hold on the subject, gained him some slight recognition.

In spite of the hopelessness of his position as regards London, London was in his soul, London continued to preoccupy his mind, London interwove itself into the fibre of his dreams, London became the one recurring faint thread holding together the otherwise drab pattern of his existence. Yet, how far away it seemed! How was he to rid himself of the responsibilities of his position as chief provider to a large family? How could he ever harvest his courage to do the impossible? Life was speeding by. He was almost twenty-seven. At his age other men had accomplished things; while others were dead, their achievement behind them. And yet, as remote as London appeared, as frail his power to consummate his dream, there was a fierceness in his desire and a mysterious faith in a miracle, wholly inexplicable and quite independent of reason, which, between moods of dejection, kept hope alive in him; only a child could believe like that. He began to speak of London at home: to sow the seed, as it were; to prepare them for impending destiny. This only culminated, however, in his mother visiting him in the attic he had lately taken up on the opposite side of the cul-de-sac, and pleading with him on her knees, tears in her eyes:

"My son, don't act rashly. What shall we do without

your help? You know how things are. There's poor Raya, dear girl; she might have married, but has sacrificed herself for the family. There's Dunya, who does all she can for us; but she's got two little ones of her own. There's Katya, who earns a trifle at Geltman's store; but, as you know, her father's blood is in her, and if she took it into her head to chuck her job she'd do it, even if we were all to starve. As for Absalom—well, you can't expect much while he's wasting his time on art. Sonya is practically an invalid—heaven only knows whether she'll ever be cured of her ear-trouble. Margaret and Misha are too small to think of doing anything. And we are alone here in this country. Our relatives in Russia know nothing about us. I do not even know where they are."

John wanted to say something about his stepfather, the begetter of most of their troubles, but, seeing tears in his mother's eyes, restrained himself. Instead, he said consolingly:

"You know, mother, I don't mean to leave like this. The children are growing up, and Absalom, sooner or later, will be making money out of his art."

"I've lost faith in Absalom," said his mother. "Lately he's been doing nothing but read books. It's his father all over again. Taking up a thing and getting tired of it. Besides, if you must go elsewhere, why not try New York? What chance have you in London? I was so glad when you became an American citizen, because I thought you had decided to settle down here. You've got brains. This country needs such as you."

"They may need me, but do they want me? But if I go to the other side and make my name there, they'll accept me here. Whistler and Henry James and Tobias Bagg have done that; yet they are Americans by blood. How much more is it necessary for me to do that, being a foreigner and a Jew. They never let me forget that, not for an instant. It's because I love my America that I want to do something for her. Even the great American poet, Walt Whitman, got his first real recognition in England."

On hearing his words, his mother wept bitterly; she was on her knees, her nearly grey head buried in the armchair; her posture was one of pleading despair. Her tears fell upon his heart, which, he thought, he had turned to steel; but they fell upon it; a truly corrosive chemical.

"Look here, mother," he said, pleading in his turn.

" I'm not going just yet. I have a sense of responsibility. You cannot have better proof than that I have already given the family the best years of my life. Haven't I worked since I was ten? "

" Yes, I know, I know," murmured his mother, embracing him. " You've been an angel."

" No, no, I haven't. I did it because I had to. You want me to be happy, don't you? Well, everyone must choose to be happy in his own way. Not even a mother can choose happiness for another. When it comes to that, I should have preferred not to have been born, not in our age; but now that I'm here, I should like to make the most of it. Still, don't worry. I'm not thinking of going now. And I may decide to try New York."

He mentioned New York merely to allay her anxiety, for he saw that she was genuinely distressed. When she left, he sat there for some time in a state of coma. London seemed far away and utterly impossible. He sat for an hour like this, muttering now and then one and the same word: " Impossible . . . impossible . . ."

After a little while he felt life coming back to him; his blood, which had disappeared he knew not where, returned to its accustomed highways; his hydra-headed desire for London ventured forth its two heads in his heart and mind. They warmed him with their breath, until he rose on his legs and shook himself.

" Well, well," he mused to himself, " I suppose I could no more help having my desire than my mother in marrying stepfather and having all those children."

There was a sudden double lunge at his head and heart. He straightened himself and clenched his fists.

" I must, and I will!" he cried aloud.

Then, raising his arms upward, like a Greek praying-boy, he addressed himself to God; imploringly at first:

" O God, a miracle! Have pity; bring a miracle to pass!"

Then cajolingly:

" O God, You know what a hard time I've had; how much I have done for the family. Sixteen years of it, O God! I cannot believe You as petty and mean as men make You. And as You are merciful, O God, have mercy on me!"

Then almost threateningly:

" But if You are just, O God, then I ask for no more than justice. If You are just, O God, then You'll make it

possible for me to go to London. I assure You, I deserve it! If I thought You were not just, I could not believe in You."

Then argumentatively:

"Put Yourself in my place, O God! Say I were in Your place—just suppose it—I'd surely let You go to London. Speaking as man to man, You know. Put Yourself in my place, O God!"

Then in a bargaining mood:

"O God, if You really mean me to go to London, You might begin by increasing my bank account. I have five hundred dollars saved up through all these years. Make it seven hundred and fifty! Make it a thousand! Make it . . . But I don't want to seem greedy, O God! You know how much I need. Come and help me, O God!"

He concluded:

"O God, give me some sign that You've heard me!"

As he dropped his outstretching arms to his sides, his eyes, slightly lowering, looked out of the window and fell upon a huge placard on a tall building not far away. It was a soap advertisement, and depicted a naked, chubby infant leaning over the side of a small tub, trying to pick up the dropped piece of soap on the floor. The inscription across the picture read: "He won't be happy till he gets it!" Gombarov recalled that there had been a different advertisement the day before. So that was God's sign he asked for! His God was clearly a humorist. The fancy cheered him, and he sat down in the armchair and, holding his head between his hands, laughed as if he had only just had a tooth pulled with gas.

II

"Yes, it is midnight in London now," Gombarov repeated to himself on his way home to dinner.

What was midnight like in London—in Piccadilly Circus? he wondered. But what was the use of thinking? Matters at home appeared to be going from bad to worse. Absalom was very much on his mind. He had told his mother that Absalom was going to make money by his art, but in his heart he had no hopes of it. He decided to have a talk with Absalom after dinner.

An incident had occurred that day which intensified his

feeling of depression. He had been walking in Broad Street, when his eyes were attracted by the painting of a huge advertisement along the third storey of a house. Two men were sitting on the swinging cradle, putting on the finishing touches. He joined the crowd of idlers who watched the men at work. Suddenly, one of the men at work looked down. Gombarov eyed him with astonishment. It was Dan Malkin! Gombarov hurried on. He thought their eyes had met; he wasn't sure.

Gombarov went into the Art Gallery, which was near by, and ran into Timothy Leslie, now emaciated with consumption.

"Hello, Tim! Think whom I have just seen! Malkin, painting an advertisement sign. Fancy Malkin coming to that! Malkin, who once taunted me with being a journalist!"

"I'm not altogether astonished," replied Leslie. "Poor Malkin! I have a tender spot for Malkin. After all, Malkin was a sacrifice for others, though you may not agree with me. He has been a Rudin to the crowd. He has not done any work himself, but by his talk he has stirred a desire in others for the right things. Putting your personal differences aside, you must admit that even you have learnt something from Malkin. If he has done no more than introduce you to Whistler and Swinburne, then he has done something for you—isn't it so?"

"You are quite right, Tim. He is a match that has been used to light a fire in others; and, like a match, thrown away afterwards." Gombarov's mood, which, on seeing Malkin, had been one of pity tinged with secret elation at the downfall of his former rival, now turned wholly to pity.

III

During dinner, John, with some annoyance, saw his mother leave the table and go into the kitchen to prepare a special vegetarian dinner for Absalom. His mother was strangely subject to the whims of her children, and spared no effort to please everyone. He made the mental reflection: "A vegetarian would spare the buttocks of an animal, and at the same time consume the heart of his mother; just as the Dukhobors[1] who went to

[1] The *Spirit-wrestlers*, a Russian sect, which practises the Tolstoyan doctrine of passive resistance.

Canada harnessed their women to the plough in order to spare their horses and oxen."

Some time after dinner, Gombarov went into the room, which was partly used as a library. He found Absalom there, absorbed in Marcus Aurelius. It was hard for him to broach the subject, but at last he ventured:

"Absalom, what do you intend doing—I mean about your art? You haven't done anything these last few weeks, and I've been worrying about you."

"Well, you needn't!" replied Absalom, and there was a hint of defiance in his voice.

"What do you mean, I needn't?"

"Just this: I've decided to give up art."

"Give it up! . . . Give it up! . . . What do you mean by 'give it up'?" There was the sense of fear, almost of horror, in John's voice.

"Just what I say. I am bored with it. I wish I had taken up science instead."

"Has it taken you four years to find out?"

"Better late than never. It was all a mistake."

"But, Absalom, you were getting on splendidly, better than anyone I know. And you had such energy. I remember you spending seven hours at a stretch before your canvas. And it was your own choice. I fought against your father to put you through Art School. I have sacrificed four years for you; have put myself back . . . and now you tell me that you have given it up!"

"You should have never encouraged me. I think you have done me an injury in encouraging me. I bear you no grudge, and you ought to bear none towards me."

"You say that to me? You mean to say . . ." He stopped. He could find no words to express his pent-up feelings.

"Don't be angry with me, and please don't shout. Let's talk quietly," said Absalom.

"Talk quietly! . . . The callousness of it!" Then it suddenly dawned upon John that the blood of old Gombarov was speaking in Absalom. A chip of the old block, if there ever was one! Self-expression at all cost; hard, and intellectually honest, to one's own hurt and to the hurt of others. "All right," said John, re-considering; "let us, as you say, talk quietly. What made you give up art?"

"I have come to the conclusion that it is useless."

"Useless? But what is not useless, in the final analysis?"

"That is true. But, relatively speaking, science is of some use. At least, it kills superstition, while art maintains it."

"What of Da Vinci, who was both artist and scientist?"

"Da Vinci had not read Darwin. He did not know biology as we know it to-day. In a sense, a schoolboy to-day knows more than Da Vinci. Again, Da Vinci lived in an age when men still lived under the illusion of romance. They had religion, and myths, and legends; and science has destroyed all that."

"So much the worse for science," retorted John. "I can understand now what Blake meant when he called art 'the tree of life' and science 'the tree of death.' Science has much to answer for."

"Art in the old days, at any rate, did try to teach the difference between so-called beauty and ugliness," went on Absalom, ignoring John's last remark. "The art of to-day teaches you that there is no difference. As a matter of fact, by adopting scientific methods, artists have surrendered art to science."

"That is the fault of the artists and not of art. Surely, the right artist can re-capture the spirit of the Old Masters."

"No, that cannot be done. The old artists derived their impulse from the life of the age; and our age is all against art. Art is, in fact, bankrupt. You often talk of a cul-de-sac. Well, art to-day is in a cul-de-sac. Only science is moving ahead."

"Surely the human body is still beautiful, as it had been in the day of the Greeks and during the Renaissance?"

"It's well you've brought the matter up. It gives me an excellent opportunity to answer you. Yes, let us consider the human body; let us see how science has changed our understanding of it. Where you see beauty, I see utility; where you see beautiful black or golden hair, I see it merely as a protection for the head; where you see grace in human limbs, I see in them means of locomotion; where you see the velvety softness of an eye, I see it as a bit of jelly overhung with a curtain for the purpose of seeing. Almost every organ of our body is made to feed our stomach: the ears to hear the tread

of our prey, the eyes to see it, the legs to run after it, the hands to grasp it, the pearly teeth—which you so admire—to bite it, and so on, and so on. . . . You are moved by tears, aren't you? Yet what are tears? Well, you'll remember in 'The Alkahest,' Balthazar says to his dying wife: 'Tears contain a little phosphate of lime, chloride of sodium, mucin and water.' In these words Balzac has foretold the modern attitude towards romance. For the whole world has become scientific."

"It seems to me," said John, "it's science, not art, that has run you into your cul-de-sac. I certainly look to art to get me out of mine. And where did you learn all this?"

"From the books you've collected. If I hadn't read them, possibly I would have still gone on with my art. But I have no illusions about it now."

"Curse the books! But the harm can't be undone now. What do you intend doing?"

"Look for some sort of job."

"Perhaps I can find you one at the *New World*. Perhaps as a copy-holder. I'll see what I can do. All the same, it's a great pity."

IV

"Four years . . . four long years . . . all for nothing . . ." muttered John to himself, stunned by what he had just learnt, as he left Absalom and walked into the dining-room. Here he found his mother and his Uncle Baruch talking. His mother was saying:

"Yes, we are all going to the dentist's. Our family has spent a fortune on teeth; quite enough to have bought a house with. I wonder whether it's because we are foreign to this climate; or whether it's because of adulterated food and tinned stuffs."

"But the American dentists are very good; that's an infallible sign that the teeth of the nation are bad," said Uncle Baruch paradoxically. "In Central Africa there are no dentists at all, and in consequence the teeth are superb. If the dentists were paid as the Chinese doctor is paid: only when the patient is well: then there would be no bad teeth. The dentist would adopt preventive measures instead of making endless repairs; and the American people would stop drinking ice water and consuming hot coffee together with cold ices. Bad teeth are a product of civilisation. By the way, John,"

said Uncle Baruch, suddenly seeing his nephew, "do you know the origin of dentistry?" There was a good-natured twinkle in his eyes as he spoke.

"No, uncle," said John, somewhat listlessly. "What is the origin of dentistry?"

"You've heard of King John, haven't you?"

"Yes," replied John.

"Well, this King John had a number of rich Jews in his kingdom. These Jews had as many sacks of gold as they had good teeth in their heads. When King John was short of money, he thrust one of these Jews into gaol. Every day he would pull a tooth out of the Jew's mouth, until the money was forthcoming. For each delay the Jew had to pay more ducats. Naturally, King John could not be expected to draw these teeth for nothing, particularly since healthy teeth are harder to draw than decayed ones. And one extraction deserves another. This is the origin of dentistry, and I need hardly add that the high prices for the work have prevailed to this day."

John smiled. He was in no mood that evening to laugh loudly at his uncle's jokes. He sat a few minutes longer, then picked up his hat and went across the way to his attic.

V

Gombarov lay awake nearly all night, thinking over matters.

"If Malkin is Rudin," he thought, "then Absalom is Bazarov." He saw clearly that both had their uses: one as an inspirer of young men; the other as a destroyer of false illusions. Absalom was surely badly entangled in the tree of knowledge. Nevertheless, his own ideas had become much clearer after the talk. He grasped the main point of Absalom's argument, and it was this: in the old days an artist could readily fall in with his environment, whose product he was; in our own industrial age, a man, to be an artist worth his salt, must react from his environment. There were no threads which bound the artist to society at large; there were few who had strength to react from conditions and to stand alone. His stepfather, his uncle, Malkin, Absalom—distinguished intellectual figures, bearing unwanted gifts—passed before his eyes, which welled with tears of pity.

Had his sacrifice for Absalom been in vain? Is all

self-sacrifice in vain? It was true that he had learnt something; that he had begun to have an inkling of what his life work was to be—but the terrible price he had paid for this knowledge! It was also true that he might have never got into the art world had it not been for Absalom—but the price!

He could lie no longer there with those thoughts of his. He got up, and went to the window and watched the dawn break. As he stood there, his eyes fixed on one spot in the distance, a new thought came into his mind, a new reason for going to London: the most important of all.

"All my brothers and sisters are such good, such honest, such capable, quite out-of-the-ordinary people. But they are all like children, fatherless in spite of a father, and looking up to me almost as to a father. But they are quite helpless, and I have been a prop to them. That may be bad for them. Look at the injury I have done to Absalom by my kindness. Wouldn't it have been better if I had gone long ago, and left them to shift for themselves? Wouldn't I have been just like them if I had not gone out into the street, and rubbed against this beastly world? Yes, yes, I must get away, if only for their sake. By staying I'll only sacrifice them and myself. But I mustn't go just yet. I must get them used to the idea. To go would be a kindness to them in the long run. I must go, I must go."

He stood there for another quarter of an hour, immovable; then went to bed, and fell asleep almost at once.

CHAPTER III

I

AN ancestor of Ethel Revere's had not actually come over on the *Mayflower*, but on "the next boat," and this fact alone, notwithstanding that he had been a butcher, made the Reveres one of the most blue-blooded families of America. It was therefore not with a little condescension that Miss Revere, who wrote for the *New World* only for pin money—just as, for pin-money, her more celebrated cousin, Miss Jane Hobhouse-Montmorency-Browne, followed the profession in which

Cervantes starved—had consented to dine with Gombarov, who could trace only seven generations of physicians in his family; a fact insufficient to cover his indiscretion of having come over in person on a modern steamer, and not having chosen an ancestor who had come over on a sail-boat. Miss Revere let him understand this indiscretion and her own condescension in consenting to dine with him by refusing his second invitation in a manner which left no doubt as to the inviolability of the sacred Revere blue blood. On the occasion of their dinner they talked of intellectual matters. She was a transcendentalist and hitched her wagon to Emerson. Gombarov committed the indiscretion of asking her opinion of Walt Whitman.

"Walt Whitman? I detest him. He writes of nasty things. I like my poets, as I like my friends, nice men with clean minds."

Gombarov could not help saying: "Don't you think that some of these clean people are a little over-clean sometimes? I mean to say that their minds are as clean of ideas as of dirt."

Miss Revere's mouth assumed a hard look. It was the one feature of her face that he didn't like. It was straight and thin-lipped; it might have been cut with a ruler. It hinted at an ancestry several generations of which had gripped their teeth and held their mouths hard in the suppressing of their passions. He had noticed the same kind of mouth in Marianne Kent and in other women of his acquaintance.

"It's not ideas but ideals that I like in men," replied Miss Revere haughtily. "Ideas make anarchists, ideals make good Americans."

Her next remark dispelled any doubts he may have had as to whom the allusion was made.

"I believe," she said, "you like all those nasty people: Whitman, Ibsen, Strindberg, and that Russian with the long funny name . . ."

"You mean Dostoevsky?"

"That's the name. I tried to read a story of his—I forget what it's called . . ."

"You mean, perhaps, 'Crime and Punishment.'"

"Yes, that's it. Think of writing about such nasty people!"

"But I think Sonya one of the most beautiful characters in fiction. Isn't there something beautiful in

a character who can go out into the street to sell her body for the sake of her little brothers and sisters, and yet keep her mind and heart pure? In fact, I would call her the potential ideal woman."

"I call it horrible," said Miss Revere.

"It's certainly preferable to having a clean body and a nasty mind; which, modern German psychologists tell us, is the rule. After all, the Western possession of bath-tubs cleans only our outsides; but all the great religions come from the East. Christ had something to say on this subject of inner dirt and outer cleanliness."

Gombarov felt himself getting combative and argumentative. He detested such a mood in himself as in others. He wished he had not started. He had meant his meeting with Miss Revere to be a flirtation; and, like most things planned, it turned out to be otherwise. He caught himself, as he talked, in the mirror opposite; his face was screwed up into a grimace; ugly, he thought; for the thousandth time he said to himself: "I must not argue; it is bad to argue." He liked his face in repose. Her face, too, suffered for her arguing; it was as if all her puny thoughts had grafted themselves on to her face for the time being and spoiled its prettiness. But beauty was a virtue in itself; he would have been content merely to look on. How was he to change the subject? Presently Miss Revere herself offered a way out. It was time for her to be home, she said.

"Another fizzle!" he said to himself, after seeing her on the train. An insurmountable wall appeared to separate him from native women; their training and his.

II

Just as Gombarov had decided that there was nothing to hope for, as far as he was concerned, from native gentile women, a surprise awaited him in the person Marianne Kent.

One day he called on her, and was conducted upstairs into her "den." It was a small attic-room, furnished with a small table, two armchairs and a wall of bookshelves; but its most striking piece of furniture was a divan in the corner, comfortably arranged, with bright-coloured cushions. All available space on the walls was taken up with pictures, and Gombarov was astonished to

find that most of these were of Napoleon, in almost every conceivable pose.

"I have a Napoleon picture which you haven't in your collection," said Gombarov, laughing.

"Do let me have it," said Marianne. "I'll give you something else for it. He's my hero, you see."

"You can have it for nothing," said Gombarov. "Only I was wondering how it is that you, an American girl, should want such a bad, wicked man as Napoleon all over the place."

"I like that," said Marianne. "You come to see my den the first time, and are already criticising it."

"I am not, really," said Gombarov. "I was merely thinking of a girl I took out to dinner the other night. Her ancestor had somehow missed the *Mayflower*, but managed to catch the next boat; and now she thinks that nothing good has come out of Europe since that day. But I have a sort of suspicion that good old Pluto had scrambled in as a stowaway along with the *Mayflower* crowd."

"And is now the President of a Trust!" said Marianne.

"Precisely," replied Gombarov.

"The trouble with your friend," said Marianne, "is probably that she never got out of her environment; but I am a violent reaction from mine. If you'll look at my book-shelf, you'll see that I have no prejudice against Europe."

It was quite true. There were sets of Hardy, Shaw and Meredith; and translations of the continental writers: Ibsen, Hauptmann, Nietzsche, Strindberg, Dostoevsky, and others of the same category.

"That's a favourite volume of mine," said Marianne, pointing to the "Diary of Marie Bashkirtseff."

"I suppose you keep a diary yourself?" said Gombarov.

"To be sure I do," replied Marianne. "I've already got my first impressions of you in it. And to-night, perhaps, if you prove interesting, I shall add something to them."

"I see that I must be careful what I say. Will you show me what you have written?"

"I never show my diary to anyone."

"It's as bad as all that? The unvarnished truth, and that sort of thing?"

"Yes. A woman's first impressions are everything.

For she gets a man's character by intuition. And one's intuition is strongest precisely before one knows anything of a man. Nothing you do or say can alter what I have already put in about you, so you needn't feel any constraint whatsoever."

"In other words, you've got my number, as they say. Whatever I say or do, you'll make me fit that number."

"Don't be alarmed, John," said Marianne reassuringly. "If I didn't think we'd be good friends, I shouldn't have asked you up here."

"Oh, I don't think we shall quarrel."

"Don't be too sure of that," laughed Marianne. "You may have no such intention. But it takes one to make a quarrel, you know."

"That's true. It never occurred to me. I also mistrust proverbs."

"We shan't quarrel yet," said Marianne. "We are not good enough friends for that."

"I suppose one must learn the other's weak spots first."

They looked at each other and laughed.

"Oh, I must show you my album!" exclaimed Marianne, and, climbing up on a chair and stretching her slender body and arms to reach down the volume from the top of the tall book-shelf, she showed her pretty legs; but once she got down and seated herself on the divan, with the album in her lap, she kept on pulling down her skirt every time it went above the ankles.

"I suppose this is your collection of scalps," said Gombarov.

"Not the whole book, surely. I have a separate section for that," laughed Marianne. "Let's turn to that first." And she began to recount the history of each portrait.

Gombarov, sitting at her side, and finding it pleasant, now and then snatched a sidelong glance at her graceful neck and shoulders and white bosom emerging from her open white sailor suit, which was very becoming to her.

"Now here is Billy White, God bless him!" Marianne was saying. "Are you interested?"

Gombarov, quickly recovering from his embarrassment in having one of his glances intercepted, replied:

"Exceedingly!"

"I mean in what I am telling you," said Marianne slyly; whereupon they both laughed like children.

" I must tell you," went on Marianne, " how Billy and I fell out. It was over fudge."

" Fudge? "

" Yes, fudge. You know the candy called fudge? Billy and I went to a party one evening, and some of the girls got together in the kitchen and began making fudge. Suddenly Billy comes running in from the kitchen with a piece of fudge in a spoon. ' Here, Marianne, is a piece of fudge for you.' ' I don't want it,' said I. He went on begging me to have it, and I went on repeating, ' I don't want it.' At last I got into a temper, and he became sulky. ' It's a sign you don't love me,' said he. ' I don't know what fudge has got to do with it.' ' You've always taken everything I've given you,' said he. ' It's not polite to remind one,' said I. ' For the love of God, take it,' said he. ' Don't blaspheme,' said I, ' and for the love of me, get out of my sight.' I got more and more into a temper. He got more sulky. At last I told him I was going home. He escorted me, and sulked all the way. Once he actually took something out of his pocket, wrapped in a paper, and put it in my hand. It was the same piece of fudge. I got into a fearful rage and threw it into the gutter. By the time I got home I was hysterical. Next day I was in bed, and when he called with a bouquet of American beauties, I refused to see him. And that was, practically, the end of Billy."

" Fudge! What a romance!" said Gombarov. " But what I'd like to know is whether you really loved him up to that point, or not? " asked Gombarov.

" Why do you ask? But as a matter of fact, I was beginning to get tired of him, and if he had offered me anything short of a diamond tiara I should probably have done the same thing."

" I thought so," laughed Gombarov. " I dare say that Billy knew, or rather felt, that the reason for your refusal went deeper than your momentary caprice."

" That's just like a man, to take a man's side!" said Marianne petulantly.

" Not at all," replied Gombarov. " I think he was a fool to insist. It's a wonder to me that you, an admirer of Napoleon, should have put up with him at all."

" One must kill time somehow, and Napoleons, even ' little Napoleons '—as the Russians say—are scarce; life is short, is boring. It's that that makes Hedda Gablers."

"That's it!" exclaimed Gombarov. "I was trying to think what you were like, and you've hit the nail on the head. There's something of Hedda in you. But, after all, what can you expect, when women form the leisured classes and men spend all their time making money to enable women to be in that position? The obvious result is that women are more interesting. Nowadays, a man who would be interesting must, almost invariably, content himself with remaining poor. Now, you wouldn't marry a poor man, would you?"

"No. The man I marry must earn at least fifty dollars a week."

"Yet you expect other qualifications?"

"Yes. He must have character and be interesting. He must be desired by other women, yet desire only me. He must be also clean, and have no past, as we understand the word."

"In short, you want a moral Napoleon; which is a contradiction in terms. It is surely a Puritan, or, if you like, American conception."

"Yes, I am a practical idealist, if you want to put it that way."

"But that, too, is perhaps a contradiction in terms. The one thing neutralises the other. I suppose you are a pessimist because you haven't found such a man?"

"No, I haven't found such a man," replied Marianne to the last part of his question.

Marianne turned the pages of the album until she came to a small portrait which was honoured by having a page all to itself. It was an interesting head, rather long, with fine features, and had keen, almost hypnotic eyes.

"What do you think of it?" asked Marianne.

Gombarov studied the face for some time. He had gathered from Marianne's manner that this man did not belong to her category of "one-night stands," but had a run of at least a season. He continued his scrutiny, but made no reply.

"You are very cautious, for a man of such independent mind as yours," said Marianne.

"It's uncanny of you to know that about me," laughed Gombarov. "But after all, I am like you, a victim of your ancestors."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this: the whole tendency of education in America is to furnish everyone with a Puritan set of

ideals; which consist, in the main, of two things: the repression of one's natural instincts, and efficiency. These two faculties go together, as a man who lives fully cannot also be useful. The amount of money a man makes has, naturally, become the standard measure of his usefulness; and, judged by this standard, Rockefeller is our most useful citizen. He is useful because he employs hundreds of thousands of human beings; and by his own usefulness and abstemiousness sets an example to them; and they are led to believe that by practising all virtues, they too have a chance of becoming Rockefellers, though it involve the loss of one's hair and digestive organs. Rockefeller is, in fact, our supreme Puritan, the direct product of the New England mind, which has coloured the rest of the country. Now, I have had the misfortune to be born and to live my childhood in the Russian woods, and having had no early training to speak of, my heart and mind turn to nature and natural inclinations. In my heart I feel what is right and wrong. Lying in bed at nights, I ask myself all sorts of questions: What is the use of being useful? What object can there be in what men call 'getting on'? Circumstances make me outwardly a Puritan: the need of being useful to my helpless family, and the atmosphere in which I live. But inwardly everything in me fights the idea. I owe that to your ancestors. But you are their victim because you want an interesting life and yet have an ingrained conception of life which cannot possibly be interesting. For that is what it amounts to, your desire of a moral Napoleon who shall earn at least fifty dollars a week."

"Your views are interesting," replied Marianne to Gombarov's long speech. "But holding such views, I honestly don't see why you've become an American."

"I believe in America's future," replied Gombarov. "The false walls she has built up against herself are bound to come down sooner or later. These walls were all right in their day, when the colonists had to fight the Indians and the harshness of nature. Now these walls have become false, even decrepit. And they will come down some day."

"I don't see what's to bring them down."

"Only art, only love of beauty can bring them down. It is the much-despised Europe that will bring this about. Even now the rich men are importing old masterpieces of

art, and giving their collections to the museums. And beauty is peculiarly infectious. Let but the young men get interested in art. Think how the Italian Renaissance was started. A number of monks, moved by religion, were painting Madonnas and the like in austere outlines. But as they painted, they gradually forgot their religion and got interested in their models; and their intellect playing upon the flesh developed the sensuous line and made of art itself a religion. Let but our young men start with the idea that they are going to make money out of art; but some of them, at any rate, as they go on painting, may forget about the money and get interested in the art itself."

"Frankly," said Marianne, "I am not so optimistic about it. I am afraid the industrial system has come to stay. You cannot put back the clock of history."

"History puts back its own clocks," replied Gombarov. "It is one thing to take a single generation or century into account. But I belong to an old race. What do we find when we take a little block of five or ten centuries into account? Then we find how easily historic epochs slide back into Middle Ages or advance to Renaissances. The clue to America came to me on my last holiday, when I visited Niagara Falls. As I stood at the edge, watching the water hurl itself below, and I thought of the wonderful power-house which I had just seen and which was not less wonderful than the God-made Falls, it occurred to me that in this motionful mountain of water was the spirit of America itself. America is a great energy, a force. Now this energy is harnessed for material ends; but what if this immense energy is ever diverted for nobler purposes, for art, for beauty, for things of the spirit? Who—what counter-force—can stop her then?"

"Your symbolic description of America," said Marianne, "reminds me of Gogol, in 'Dead Souls,' symbolising Russia as the *troika*,[1] dashing impetuously along and disappearing in the distance among the snows."

"Yes, curiously enough, I thought of Gogol's *troika* at the time the thought came into my mind," said Gombarov. "'Dead Souls' is a great book, strangely applicable to America also. The Americans, too, are dealing in dead souls. Haven't we our Chichikoffs,

[1] Sledge drawn by three horses.

dealers in dead souls, in our company-promoters and watered-stock agents? "

"You love America in a Russian way," said Marianne, laughing.

"I love America as a clear-thinking man may love a woman," returned Gombarov. "He loves her, but he sees her faults. He would like to correct them if he could. Nevertheless, he loves her in spite of her faults, than which greater love cannot be. . . . But we have strayed from our subject. You asked me about this portrait"—Gombarov fixed his eyes on the open album again. "Quite an extraordinary head—something almost hypnotic about it."

"Yes, there is . . . I'll tell you another time about it," said Marianne. "But now, come down and meet my father and mother, and have some tea."

III

The Kents were charming old people, who lived in a charming old house; and everything in the house told how intrinsically they were a part of their country's history. The Colonial element was predominant in the furniture and furnishings. There were the quaint, old-fashioned round tables, supported by one central sturdy leg; tall upright cupboards, chaste and rigidly austere, like the minds of those who made them; several ladder-back chairs; a brown-stained spinning-wheel, at which once, doubtless, sat some powdered, white-haired Penelope of the Revolution, and now relegated to perform its function as an ornament; there was old wainscoting round the walls; above it, on a ground of a warm ochre distemper, old white-and-blue china reposed peacefully in the neighbourly company of old engravings portraying American scenes and of quaint silhouettes of ancestors: the men with queues, the women with high aspiring coiffures; on the mantelpiece and elsewhere stood a number of old polished copper candlesticks with snuffers; the newest thing in the room was a sword in its scabbard over the door; it had been used by the present owner, who was a Colonel of cavalry in the war between North and South.

Everything here was neat and comfortable, and of a oneness; and to look at the two elderly occupants, it was hard to say whether the room with its contents was

made for them, or they for the room. It was a room projected from the past, and they lived in the past; the ideas of the new generation had not touched them; they still prayed to God and not to Mammon, so they had little money, they were the gentile poor. All they had to give their one child, Marianne, was a family tree, white and frail of blossom, but with no golden fruit weighing down its branches. The result of a late marriage, Marianne was " the last flower of her race." Not that she appeared old for her age; actually, she looked younger than her twenty-five years. She was lively, slender, erect; though not more erect than her stately, white-haired mother. Her age manifested itself in her hazel eyes, in which one felt a flaming curiosity; a too-deep desire to experience life, to live it to the full; and, above all, the intense inner effort to escape ennui. Her ancestors, each in his own way, had lived life; they left her only desire; the substance they had dissipated in repressed living. Their puritanic flame, burning inversely—inwardly—had burnt out their energy.

" What nice old people! What a neat, cosy house! Surely, the best of America is here," thought Gombarov, as Marianne's parents greeted him with a courtesy worthy of the surroundings.

Things were different in his own home, a junk-shop of machine-made furniture, where lived beings with diverse active brains, refusing to conform to a machine-made harmony. The Gombarovs would not be cogs; the process of standardisation evoked a fierce hostility in their souls; children in temperament, they vented their spite against inexplicable appearances by quarrelling among themselves.

" How peaceful it is here," thought Gombarov. " How nice it would be to live in a house such as this, among these quiet plates and quiet people, and to look out of the window on this quiet garden. How nice Marianne looks in her sailor suit . . ."

In the midst of the sensuous enjoyment of his domestic thought, something quite suddenly prodded him; it was another thought, the thought of London. Why should he have been accursed with this double nature: this nature for domesticity and adventuring? By what unconscionable processes had the nomadic poison got into his blood, stirring under the now more calm surfaces of him as under peaceful grasses of the earth certain,

as it were, eruptive tendencies, which made him fiercely restless and fretful, and in revolt against the prison walls shutting him in; unconsoling for all their ornamentation with quiet blue-and-white china and restful silhouettes and old-time domestic implements?

Yet surely, he thought, this quiet was more pleasing than the activities of the new Puritans, the business princes and the trust kings, who divided up the country into economic spheres, just as in feudal days the Barons divided up countries into geographical spheres. The first Puritans to reach America made the Indians drunk in order to filch the land from them in exchange for a handful of trinkets or another bottle of fire-water; the new Puritans preferred their people sober in order to get more work out of them, and sent missionaries to convert savages to Christianity and, incidentally, to the use of soap and other civilised commodities; in this way their consciences were satisfied; they were true benefactors; not to mention the fact that the All-Seeing Presence which ruled this world, and in which they believed implicitly, granted them their reward in the shape of increased dividends. Strangely enough, not one of these philanthropic gentlemen had ever thought of establishing a mission for converting Christians to Christianity. Doubtless, they argued among themselves that as "cleanliness was next to godliness" the universal use of soap was a sufficient indication that their own people were, on the whole, God-like and Christian.

Gombarov had not as yet realised that it was this external world, with all its contradictions and unnaturalness, its helter-skelter existence, that crept, as it were, into his skin, and was responsible for his unrest, which was, really, a seeking for the meaning of life—in himself and others; a meaning he could not find, since it did not seem to exist, as life was lived. As he sat there in the quiet room of the Kents, waiting for tea, he was lost in his thoughts, and watching a canary in the cage just outside the window, he said to himself:

"If that bird thinks at all, it must wonder why it's shut up in there, just as I wonder why I am shut up in my own particular cage. But if it can't think, it must feel that it's in a prison."

"Tea is ready, philosopher," said Marianne; whereupon he joined the party at the table. His domestic

thoughts returned. It was pleasant to sit with these nice quiet people and have tea. It was downright silly to want to go anywhere.

IV

After tea, Gombarov asked:

"Doesn't Barfus live somewhere in this neighbourhood?"

"Yes, the Barfuses live just around the corner," said Marianne. "I only know him at the Art School, where I'm studying under him; but I don't know Mrs Barfus, except that I've heard that her chief preoccupation is with her family-tree and the family-trees of others."

"I've also heard that about her," replied Gombarov, "but it's him I want to see. I am writing an article about his genius as an art instructor for the *New World*; and there is something I want to ask him. Do you mind if I run off and see him for a moment; or would you like to come along?"

"I don't mind. Wait a moment. I'll get my hat."

Barfus was not at home. They introduced themselves to Mrs Barfus.

"Are you the Miss Marianne Kent," asked Mrs Barfus, "who is descended on one side from the Kents of New England and on the other from the Bothwells of Virginia, and whose great-grandfather was in the first House of Congress, and had signed . . . let me see, what did he sign?"

"The very same," replied Marianne, while Gombarov tried hard to keep a straight face.

"How interesting!" said Mrs Barfus. "I can tell you a great many things about your family. . . . Genealogy is my hobby, you see. And you—I didn't quite catch your name—what families are you descended from?"

"My name is Gombarov, and I am afraid that my tree goes rather far back. The fact is, I'm descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs Barfus, who, having realised that she had said the wrong thing, hastened to repair her error. "Perhaps you belong to the Portuguese community? The Portuguese Jews have a heritage they can well be proud of."

"I am sorry to say no," said Gombarov, smiling. "I am a Russian Jew. It is true the Spanish and Portuguese Jews have the reputation of being the purest-blooded, but the Russian Jews are usually the most easily recognised."

The poor woman was by now in a desperate state; so to ease the situation Gombarov said a few admiring words about her husband and asked her when he was likely to be in.

"Yes, do come in again," said Mrs Barfus. "He's usually in evenings. I'm sure he'll be glad to see you."

"I shall be delighted," said Gombarov.

Once they turned the corner they burst out laughing.

"You are funny," said Marianne. "You are living up to my first impressions of you."

Gombarov was pleased with what he took as a compliment; he was even more pleased for not having been recognised as a Jew. It was so much easier to "get on" when one was not a Jew. Secretly he was pleased with being a Jew. Only he did not want to look like one.

V

On going home that evening, after having been prevailed upon to stay to supper, Gombarov thought to himself:

"A charming girl, Marianne. But I must be careful not to fall in love with her. Bayliss is very fond of her. Nothing must destroy our friendship."

CHAPTER IV

I

WHEN Gombarov called at the Kents' a week later, Marianne took him into the garden, where, after seating themselves in comfortable folding-chairs, she told him the story of her affair with the man with the hypnotic eyes, whose picture he saw in her album.

"I was sitting in a front seat at a theatre at Willow Grove," began Marianne. "There was a conjurer on

the stage, a man of about thirty-five, very attractive and with interesting eyes. He was showing some tricks with cards and demonstrating various illusions. He had a young lady to assist him. From the moment he appeared on the stage I could not help but watch him; his personality interested me more than his tricks; above all, his strange, penetrating eyes. At one instant he held up a box-like contrivance, open at both ends, and as he looked through it our eyes met. He seemed to get nervous. Several times he directed his eyes my way. I was fascinated by his look. He did not appear to be an ordinary performer, but a man of a higher type. I was helpless; though I tried not to, I simply had to look at him. I noted that he, too, was impelled to look at me.

"When the performance was over, and we filed out, I with my escort, I could not keep my mind off that commanding figure and those fascinating eyes. As we passed slowly round the curve of the path, he stood at the stage-door of the small theatre; I glanced at him, and he returned my glance. I passed on, but my curiosity prompted me to look back. There he was, still standing and looking intently in my direction. I felt confused and somewhat angry with myself; yet I felt conscious of a peculiar attraction, hard to explain. It seemed that never before had I met anyone like him; that fate itself had brought us together, made him for me, and me for him. I could not get rid of this thought. It pursued me, insinuated itself into my system in the most extraordinary fashion. It seemed to me that I understood him; and here, at last, I thought, was a man who understood me. Nevertheless, I was annoyed with myself for not resisting the impulse to look back. He was following close behind, with his assistant performer. Then I lost sight of him; but as we approached the moving-picture theatre, I lingered for a moment before entering, and as I turned to the left entrance, who should be standing there but he. I looked at him again, rather intently, and he raised his hat. I passed on.

"All that night I could not sleep for thinking of him. I was eager at least to obtain his autograph, to see what his chirography was like. At last I hit upon sending him a letter, asking whether a certain demonstration he had made with cards was or was not an illusion, and whether he had ever resorted to hypnotism in his experiments. Next day brought a reply. He wrote that he had used

personal hypnotism on occasions, and added: 'Are you the young lady who sat on the left, on such-and-such an evening, with a young man, etc.? Will you kindly send me a photo of yourself?'

"As you may guess, I was all in a flutter. To make the story short, we struck up an acquaintance, which, as the books say, ripened into love. What I liked about him was his almost perfect self-control, his mastery; he seemed to do the proper thing at the proper time and in the proper place. He bossed me, if you like; but he made me like being bossed. He put me on the pedestal, but he stood up on one himself, and he towered above me. He was most un-American for an American, in this respect.

"Several weeks passed very happily for me. The day was approaching for him to go on tour. A few days before his departure he came to ask me whether I would marry him. But, before I decided, he wanted to tell me the story of his life. I agreed to that, and added: 'There are three things I cannot forgive.' 'Three things you cannot forgive?' he asked. 'Do you realise, my child, what a man who has reached my age—thirty-six years—might do in his life?' He then told me about his life; and most interesting it was, full of experience and adventure. He told me about his relations with women; of his wife, from whom he had separated, a dramatic story, at the end of which, however, I said to him: 'That is one of the three things,' and I almost fainted away.

"Nevertheless, I could not give him up, but I asked him to wait until six months had passed. He was away on tour for about four months. The first few weeks we corresponded regularly. Then his letters became less regular, and somewhat more cool, though they were very kind; and I was full of all sorts of foreboding; until one day he suddenly appeared, and I fell on his neck, with reproaches. He gently took my arms down and put me with the same gentleness in the chair. He took my hands in his and began to talk, and I listened in a dazed fashion. I remember the separate phrases drifting across my dazed mind. 'I am sorry, my dear,' a voice was saying, 'sorry. But I must go away. I cannot marry you . . . you white little flower, you unsullied little flower. . . .' I was feeling as if I were going to faint, and still the same voice went on: '. . . little flower . . .

unsullied little flower . . . forget me . . . and remember this . . . it is better that this should have happened now than later . . . it is sad . . . but all life is constant change. . . . Forgive me. . . .' Then everything was silent. When I opened my eyes, I don't know how soon after, he was gone. The room was empty. . . . About a month later, in reading a newspaper, I happened to glance at the passenger-list of a liner leaving for Naples, and saw the simple announcement: ' Mr Frank Herrick and wife.' "

II

On his way home that evening Gombarov grappled with the problem of life, or rather with such of its aspects as were opened out to him by Marianne's story of her grand passion.

" It's the sort of thing that makes the modern novel," he thought. In the old days a youth loved a maiden, and she returned his love. The parents objected, forbade the young man access, shut the girl up in a room, and encouraged some detestable young man in the winning of their daughter's hand. At this point the plot began, which led to an elopement, or to a double suicide. Life was a series of actions, and the barriers and entanglements were physical and came from without, not from the hearts of the lovers. The opposition in a love romance came from one's parents and not from one's great-great-grandparents. For these inner questionings, which hindered the course of love in Marianne's case from running smooth, were surely a heritage from her ancestors. Gombarov drew a mental image of the *Mayflower* as a kind of Pandora's box, that let loose across the length and breadth of the American continent its narrow, austere ideals of good and evil, which, having served a useful function in their day, had now become moral miasma, causing all natural life to wither and infecting all flowers of joy with its blight. The natural woman's impulses in Marianne sought a strong man, a Napoleon; her puritanic impulses wanted him to be moral. She put her Napoleon on probation for six months! Her fine energy was spent between these two contradictory elements; and what the one gave the other took away.

" Is it possible," thought Gombarov, " that civilisation, with all its fine ideals, actually dehumanises one, makes

one incapable of living life normally, and inflicts upon one a Janus-faced nature, which pulls in two opposite directions and renders it impossible to live either an ideal or a sensual life?"

So it seemed. Marianne, who had the makings of a fine woman, was wasting away under this double demand. He felt that he, too, had been touched, if to a lesser degree, by the infectious ideals of his place and age; and that it was conflict that made him suffer.

For the thousandth time he asked himself the question: Was he wrong, or the world wrong? As apparently the world disagreed with him, he felt that he might be on the way to madness. But how was he to stop thinking his thoughts? Not even Galileo could stop thinking that the earth moved round the sun when the rest of the world was firmly convinced that the earth stood still. Was he, then, a Galileo? No. He knew he was only a poor oppressed human being, who could not understand why God gave men such a capacity for happiness, and caused them to deny themselves the happiness they could have. Nevertheless, he was like Galileo in that under all his oppression and torment he continued saying to himself, as it were under his breath: "But men *can* be happy!"

But his fellows still said to him: "Don't take things so seriously. Why don't you put on a smile?"

In his heart he knew, or rather felt, with an almost consuming intensity, that he could outlaugh any of them, if only . . . There was no laughing, with one's eyes peering from behind prison bars. But one might laugh, while riding a horse in open spaces, or in the arms of a woman. . . .

Surely, his thoughts were lashing him on to madness. But there, too, in the madhouse, one might laugh. . . .

CHAPTER V

I

"IF only something would happen!"

That has become the mental attitude of the average individual in the modern world, a world in which trains run at seventy miles an hour, China and the Wild West brought almost to your very doors on

the kinematograph, Melba's or Caruso's voice made audible in your own house by means of the gramophone; a world, too, in which there are seedless oranges (to save you the trouble of swallowing the pips), waiterless restaurants (where by dropping coins into slot-machines you can have the pleasure of serving yourselves), wireless telegraphy (which miraculously enables you to talk with ships at sea), etc., etc. Yet, strangely enough, all these up-to-date speed and labour-saving devices, far from enlivening the existence of the individual and widening his horizons and giving him leisure for mental development and play, actually have had the opposite effect, in that they have made man's world smaller and paralysed his life in the degree that the machine's life increased in intensity; there is no room for two intelligences on earth, and the machine had become stronger than man. And man, relegated to a secondary place as servant to the machine, and restive under his self-imposed bondage, began, in his heart's despair, to cry out his new cry, uttered more often than the Lord's Prayer: "If only something would happen!" But the wheels, regardless, went on whirring round and round; the belts, automatic serpents, with a fast, slippery glide, went on hissing and rustling; the shuttles went on shooting back and forth, reiterating their relentless mechanical rhymes; and men stood by, mechanical regulators, parts of machines, not less essential than other parts, and the only sign of humanity in those in whom a spark of humanity remained was the reiterated fleeting thought: "If only something would happen!"

This malady of the Machine Age affected even those who did not work at machines; these were the sensitive natures who were infected far more by the atmosphere the machines had created.

"If only something would happen!" Marianne would say, when Gombarov called. As the weeks passed by and nothing came to change the routine of his own life, Gombarov got into the habit of repeating to himself almost mechanically: "If only something would happen!"

His Saturday visits to the Kent house were pleasant, at any rate. For Marianne's sake he had curbed his curly locks; by not a little effort and the assistance of a cosmetic he managed to press down his unruly hair and to part it on the side: a revolutionary proceeding which

at once caused Gombarov's colleagues at the *New World* to conclude that he "had a girl" and this girl was performing a useful function in "rubbing off his rough edges"; one or two demurred, however, and said that if that were so, it was a pity; to them Gombarov's whole charm lay precisely in his rare, rough edges. "Anyway," said one, "there's something no girl can take away, and that's his rough edges inside. He's the sort that may surprise you some day."

All this had been told Gombarov by one who participated in the discussion and had espoused Gombarov's rough edges. "The sort that may surprise you all some day!"—the phrase insinuated itself into his system, as it were a seed cast carelessly upon fertile ground, and taking root there; like that other phrase he had heard from Malkin and others: "I didn't know it was in you." And only the other day, when he had presented Marianne with a new photograph of himself, Marianne, after studying the picture for some time, said: "All you want to do is to live up to your photo. You are audacious, and you don't know it. But the picture has caught you at a moment when the audacious part of you was uppermost. If it were not for other things in you, you'd accomplish things."

Gombarov was astonished that other people should have faith in him, when he had none himself. He was even more astonished at the potency of words and phrases. There was nourishment in the faith of others for his own faith. It was quite possible, he thought, that others knew him better than he knew himself. And these evidences of faith on the part of others fell on his ears with the effect of prophecy, which, in hopeful moments, he felt he must substantiate. But when he faced the facts of his life, there appeared to be no way out. The wall which Circumstance had erected for his thwarting showed no signs of tottering. On the contrary, it had gained reinforcements in the form of his sister Sonya's illness, which promised to make her a permanent invalid. As against this accretion to the wall, he had added a few more paltry "greenbacks" to the very small pile he had at the savings bank. It was very poor ammunition against a wall like that.

Over three months had gone by since Gombarov had become acquainted with Marianne, and he grew very fond of her. He was not exactly in love with her; but she was

"a good pal," and her company, the first granted him by a woman, refreshed him and softened his deep unrest. He and Marianne used to go along the dark, quiet streets sometimes, their hands in each other's, swinging their arms; as yet he had not kissed her, although one evening Marianne teasingly sent him round to the corner candy-store to buy some "kisses," and he foolishly went and bought some, instead of supplying them out of his own "bounteous store." Not so much shyness as loyalty to Bayliss was at the bottom of his abstention. He imagined that there was "something on" between Marianne and Leon, and not even a woman's kisses, much as he desired them, were worth getting at the expense of his friendship. Leon and he were beginning to be jocularly called "David and Jonathan."

II

As for Bayliss, he had no time to stop and say to himself, "If only something would happen!" And he had no time to pay much attention to Marianne. Things were happening thick and fast for him—in a fashion. He had been hoping to win a Scholarship to Europe; surely, if devotion to one's chosen art and merit in its practice deserved encouragement—in Bayliss's case it meant material encouragement, enabling him to go on—then Bayliss had every reason to expect that one of the awards would be his. As it was, his name was discussed in connection with the last award; his one competitor was Miss Priscilla Stanton Vanclerque, a society girl with a family-tree, which had fruit on it in the shape of golden dollars. The greatness of her wealth was exceeded only by the insignificance of her artistic talent. She was, moreover, engaged to be married to a rich young man belonging to "one of the best families"; this was her last season at Art School; she was to be married in the autumn. It was hard to say by what process of reasoning the Art School Committee, consisting of the directors and faculty, had awarded the prize. It may have been that they did not wish to violate the eternal law of "To him that hath shall be given"; it may have been because "all the world loves a lover," and they had thought it a pity that Miss Vanclerque, putting dollars aside, should be bringing no more than her chaste virtue to her young man; virtue was not enough—it would be nice to

throw in "an accomplishment"—were not our art schools and musical academies built chiefly for giving "accomplishments" to marriageable girls, thereby adding to their value? Whatever may have been the reason for the award—and all speculation is idle—Bayliss did not get his scholarship. One knew that at once, when Henry Barfus, the best instructor at the School and an ardent believer in Leon's talent, was seen to leave the committee meeting in a fearful rage, a mood uncommon to him.

Things went from bad to worse for the Baylisses. The little restaurant did not pay. The place was closed, and Leon went out to look for a job.

One autumn evening, the evening of the Autumn Masquerade Ball at the Art School, a party of girls arrived in the ballroom, and a small circle soon gathered round them; they were talking animatedly and whispering. It was clear that the party had brought some news of especial interest. Gombarov, dressed as a stage Cossack, and Marianne, dressed as a Russian peasant girl, approached the party and listened.

"Think of what we've just seen!" said one of the newcomers in response to a question. "Leon Bayliss in a trolley-conductor's uniform!"

"The fact is," put in another, "we came down on his trolley."

"He took off his cap and greeted us with a smile," said a third.

"It was perfectly tragic!" said a fourth.

"It's a shame!" went up a chorus of voices.

Nevertheless, Bayliss, in his spare hours, which were not many, continued coming to Art School, usually in his conductor's uniform, to save time. Gombarov, like the rest, was astonished at his friend's courage. He felt that he couldn't have done it himself. For the first time, the most influential instructor at the School, who was also a fashionable portrait-painter, began to pay attention to the young man's art; while his colleagues, a little conscience-stricken, privately began to express their regrets at not having given Bayliss a scholarship.

"I believe you've been in Europe before," said, one day, the influential instructor in the life class.

"Yes," replied Bayliss.

"How did you go? On a scholarship?"

"No; on a cattle ship. I worked my way to London to see the Whistler Memorial Exhibition."

"Ha, ha! Not on a scholarship, but on a cattle ship! Ha, ha! That's good! You'll get on, young man. We must see whether you can't go on a scholarship next time."

In the meantime, one or more of Bayliss's cronies made his long working hours easier by joining him on his trolley, where, when the traffic was light, they carried on their usual discussions on art, between the ringing up of the fares. One or two circuits would be made in this way, with a ten minutes' interval for coffee at the terminus. Gombarov saw him almost every day, and when the traffic was heavy would assist in signalling to the driver while his friend was collecting the fares.

As Roney once expressed it in his picturesque way: "To compare the Contemporary Club to this trolley platform is like comparing a plugged dime to a twenty-dollar gold piece."

Which was doubtless quite true.

CHAPTER VI

I

IT was Bayliss's day off, and Gombarov, coming to sit for him, knocked on his studio door, in an old curious-shaped ramshackle building, the ground floor of which was occupied by a wholesale fruit-merchant, while its upper floors, very much the worse for neglect, were let as studios to poor artists. It being a corner building, curving broadly at the corner and narrowing towards the back, the two rooms on Bayliss's floor resembled, if anything, two cuts of apple pie, with separate entrances at the narrowest part; while a large opening, originally fitted up with doors, as was evident from the remaining rusty hinges, was overhung with a piece of faded red velvet drapery, providing privacy for the two occupants. The other room had been formerly occupied by Abe Rozinsky; but, having lost his health in a futile struggle for existence, the Law of Chance counted him out as far as art was concerned, and the poor fellow, who had added not a little to the gaiety of the crowd, departed for California, whence curious rumours began to circulate concerning him: that he was married,

that he was picking oranges for a living, that he had become a kinema actor; only it wasn't quite clear whether he was married in a kinema drama and picking oranges in a kinema scene, or whether he was married and picking oranges for his own good. At all events, Bayliss's crowd had become reconciled to his loss, and Rozinsky's room was now occupied by Thomas Duncan, a young virginal personage, who, being blessed with an absence of artistic temperament and ambition, was more able to cope with the practical problems of life. He made his living by drawing for advertisements; he reversed the usual procedure and "did art on the side." He was, however, quite unaffected, chaste, sentimental and boyish. He was sandy-haired and pale, very quiet, had no vices except that of cigarette-smoking; without a nasty thought, he told clean stories with a bad breath, which was due to a poor digestion. His predominant quality was his helpless boyishness, and he was affectionately called "Tommy" by all who knew him.

Having knocked on both doors and received no response, Gombarov ran upstairs and knocked on Harry Spangler's door.

"Come in!" shouted Spangler.

On entering, Gombarov found Spangler painting a portrait of a woman peeling potatoes. Cellini's words were fully applicable to the relations of the pair: "Being an artist, I used her for my art; being also a man, I used her for my manhood."

She called out lustily: "Is that you, Gomby? If you stay long enough, you can have some chicken soup."

At the same instant Gombarov heard a hen's cackle, and looking in the direction whence it came he saw a large, fat hen stalking about the room, to all appearances unaware of its impending fate. Gombarov burst out laughing; whereupon Spangler, dropping his brushes and seizing a sharp knife from the table, flourished it playfully, sing-songing at the same time:

"This is the hand that holds the knife that will kill the hen that will go in the soup that Gomby will eat!"

Had Spangler been more of a prophet, he would have added that, a few weeks hence, in an altercation with his Joan, the self-same knife, thrown by her deft hand, would land in his left buttock, necessitating his going to the doctor to have the wound cauterised. Perhaps it was just as well that he didn't know.

"I'm afraid I shan't have time," Gombarov excused himself. "I think Leon has just come in. I heard his door bang. Thanks very much. May see you later." And he ran downstairs.

II

Bayliss quickly arranged his palette, and posing Gombarov in a chair on a portable platform, set to work. It was easily the fifteenth sitting, and the portrait, a large one, was far from finished. They talked as the work proceeded.

"You have a very elusive face, John," Leon was saying. "It seems never to be the same twice. You had one expression at the last sitting, now you have another. It's hard to keep up with you. Sometimes you look twice as old, sometimes twice as young. Sometimes there's pathos in your face, sometimes there's something—what shall I call it?—well, Voltairean, almost diabolic. It is as if there were two people in you. One ought to paint you at a sitting."

"Yes, that's quite true. I often feel as if there were two persons in me, one fighting the other. I think that's what scares people away from me. I remember one day how . . ."

Just then there was a knock on the door.

"Damn!" said Gombarov. "I hope it isn't Ruth Edgar. I am sorry to say that's one person I haven't scared away. That female follows me around like a little dog, though I don't show the slightest inclination for her company."

"You should have touched wood when you spoke," laughed Bayliss. "I'm afraid it's she. I can tell her knock. She knows you're here to-day, because it's my day off." He went to the door and admitted Miss Edgar.

Miss Edgar was a rather colourless personage, with a dull, drawling voice. Her face was round and puffy, while her thin neck, thin waist and thin ankles rather emphasised the otherwise ample rotundities of her anatomy. There were men upon whom these rotund promontories appeared to exercise a special charm; not a few considered her pretty. Gombarov was not among them. He quickly noted that on this occasion one of her

stockings showed a tendency to looseness, a negligence he could not endure in a woman; and this added to the customary irritation which she produced in him. Besides, he had once seen her eat celery, which resembled to a marked degree the performance of a sword-swallower.

Bayliss continued working on the portrait, while Miss Edgar prattled on.

"Don't, don't! I've only read him through friends," Miss Edgar was saying in her usual drawling manner, in response to a remark about Walter Pater. "I don't want anyone to know that I've read Pater. There's another author that I don't want anyone to know I've read. That's Browning. I met a girl out in the country the other day, who insisted on talking to me about Browning. I said I didn't want to read about Browning, and didn't think much of club women or Browning societies. Later, I found that her mother belonged to about a hundred Browning societies and clubs. She asked me whether I discovered any underlying currents in Browning, and I replied: 'I never read poetry to discover underlying currents. . . .'"

While she was prattling on in this fashion at a snail's pace, Gombarov was working himself up into a rage; he tried to keep his face and expression as posed by his friend, while the thoughts inside his head rambled on in this fashion:

"Damn . . . double damn . . . triple damn! What does she mean by plaguing me like that? Why precisely she, and not someone else? Just my luck! But that's the way of the world. . . . 'There are some women a man wouldn't have, and there are some the devil wouldn't have.' She clearly belongs to the latter category. And yet they say that one or two men are deeply in love with her, and that she's leading them a song and dance. Is that possible?" (He looked askance at her.) "They call themselves artists, too! They couldn't possibly be artists! Perhaps it isn't her face they admire. What then? They surely don't admire the rather over-emphasised eccentricities of the feminine anatomy. Why does she lace so tightly? There is ugliness in this over-emphasis. Is it her intellect that attracts them? There she goes prattling on. Won't she ever stop? What prevents me from jumping at her throat and making her stop? I wonder. . . . Ah, I have it. It's civilisation!" He recalled his own definition of civilisation. "It's

sitting as quietly as possible in a dentist's chair, and having your teeth pulled. . . ." His mood forced itself to his face in a restrained, ironic, not undiabolic smile. He felt it coming on, and he took pleasure in its protection.

"I say," exclaimed Bayliss suddenly, "do you know that you've entirely altered the expression of your face in the last five minutes? How do you expect me to paint your portrait? I am painting the pathetic you, not the diabolic you."

"He feels like that because I'm here," drawled Miss Edgar.

Gombarov put his face in his hands and went off into a fit of laughter, the sort of laughter that follows when you've had a tooth pulled with gas.

"I'll try and be good," he said, on recovering, and resumed his pose.

He tried to train his thoughts pathetically to give the desired expression to his face. By hard fighting he did it. Miss Edgar aroused his pity now. "Poor girl, she can't help herself," he mused. "She's a product, or, if you like, victim, of this ugly age as much as any of us. Externally, she has been cramped into this shape by the ugly corsets; internally, she has been cramped by the petty and ugly thoughts forced upon her by a false education and surrounding ugliness. And I'm hardly better, with my ugly ill-fitting clothes and with the petty thoughts in my head and petty feelings in my heart, constantly forced upon me from the outside; and they manage to get the best of me sometimes in spite of all my efforts." He fell into a mood of self-pity; but was rescued by his thoughts reverting to that wonderful chapter about Nausicaa in the Odyssey, with its realistic picture of harmonious earthly life, perfect down to the pettiest detail. It was terrible to think of the ugliness created by men, and that they thought this ugliness beautiful and called it "progress." "But it is far more terrible," thought Gombarov, "for sensitive beings, who know the truth, who are constantly being hurt by the world, their best instincts thwarted; if geniuses, their genius wasted. . . . Such men become neurotics. . . . All the finest minds to-day are possessed by neurotics. . . . A healthy mind in a healthy body no longer holds good to-day. . . ."

Thus absorbed in his thoughts, he no longer listened

to the prattling of Miss Edgar, until awakened from his reverie by Bayliss, who remarked:

"That will do for to-day. It's getting dark."

III

While Bayliss was washing his brushes other Art School students began to drop in. To Gombarov's great relief, Marianne came in, and he was soon absorbed in a conversation with her. If Miss Edgar was annoyed, she did not show it; her stupid face was incapable of responding to any feeling she possessed. The only evidence of emotion was in the words she addressed to Bayliss, in her usual drawling, colourless, unconcerned voice: "He l-looks s-so in-ten-n-se!" Gombarov looked "in-n-ten-n-se" with a purpose; he had hoped that his absorption in Miss Kent would keep Miss Edgar off. Marianne, in fact, had an interesting piece of information to convey; it was that, acting on Gombarov's advice, she made the rounds of the newspaper offices and found a reporter's job on the *Daily Newsmonger*. This was a manœuvre designed to counteract the clamorous demands of life; by diverting one's energy into another channel, to suppress, eradicate and slay the romantic longings of a modern virgin whose romantic ideal was Napoleon; not merely Napoleon, but a *moral* Napoleon! Gombarov was elated at the thought that *his* suggestion had been acted upon, and with such success. He was beginning to think he was an influential person. At that time he had not yet rid himself of that exquisite pleasure which he, in common with the rest of humanity, enjoyed in meddling in other people's lives. That was perhaps natural on the part of one whose life had been so preposterously meddled with; he sometimes felt that not only his own family but the whole world had a finger in it; in consequence of which his life was becoming more and more of a bungle and a mess. But now, at last, he was having a finger in someone else's life; he was beginning to understand the joy of kings and the pleasure of tyrants. There was something to be said for them, no doubt. Gombarov was yet to learn the real extent of his influence on Marianne's life.

Roney soon came in, with a dark, well-shaped girl, who was charming without giving away her secret. Violet

Woden's facial charm did not lie in its individual features, which were far from perfect, but in the way those features were lit up by . . . but that was Violet's secret. But even our machine civilisation has not yet invented a means of gauging a woman's attraction in terms of horse-power; surely, Miss Woden's figure would have been a high one if one was to judge by the way young men gravitated towards her; Roney, in particular, who had been paying court to her for about two years, " with fluctuating success," as they speak of battles in military communiqués. On days when she radiated the full flood of her light on Roney, Roney would radiate light too. But there were days when Roney came round the studio, looking the famous Indian chief, " Rain-in-the-Face "; then one instinctively knew that Miss Woden had withdrawn her light from him, had surrounded herself with a grey cloud, and well it was for him if it did not burst. Miss Woden's price was rather higher than Miss Kent's. Her " stipulation," thrown out in casual conversations, was that the man she married must earn at least seventy-five dollars a week; on the other hand, she did not expect to get a Napoleon for the price. Moralists may object to this way of looking at things, transcendentalists may rave about " higher values," poets may sing of " love in a cottage "; but sensible people know that you can't enjoy a landscape on an empty stomach. Gombarov, too, was beginning to find out that you can't live lyrically without money. It was true that most moneyed people who came under his observation lived anything but lyrically. Men who had money appeared to love it for its own sake, and to value things according to the price they paid for them. There was something to be said for civilisation in this respect, thought Gombarov, who had read somewhere how in some parts of Africa a man had to give up four cows in exchange for a wife: which, at the best, meant that he gave up four beasts to get one super-animal; but here in the West, things were different; and visions involuntarily rose in his mind of rare, delicate women in all their pornographic charm, suggestions of which came to him in fleeting glimpses as he passed the big shop-windows displaying feminine underwear. Only some poor struggling author would now and then get sat upon for displaying the same wares in his books.

Fast on the heels of the last pair came in Miss Muriel Perkins. Of medium height, her body in her close-fitting

garments was beautiful and slender; it rather astonished one to find that she had relatively thick maternal ankles. Her walk was sure, easy and gliding; a believer in the reincarnation theory would have had some reason for inferring that she had been a cat in her previous existence, but a very beautiful one. She had black hair, which on closer acquaintance showed a tinge of copper-red. With a long, but not too long, nose, rather well-shaped, her face was also long and Oriental; her teeth were slightly prominent and slightly carnivorous, and her lips were full, "made for kisses," as the saying goes. Her eyes were dark, long and narrow, saucy and challenging. Gombarov admired her, but was afraid of her. Like her friend Violet, Muriel possessed the power of gravitation, as far as young men were concerned, to a marked degree; she possessed in equal measure the power of repulsion. Men were drawn to her by the imperative glance of her eyes; and sent retreating in confusion by the native wit of her tongue. When times were dull and she rested from her painting, she had always this diversion to fall back upon. She was priceless enough in her way, and she had no price. She was unaccountable, and doubtless mad enough to have married a poor man, if she liked him. There was but one point in which she resembled other native girls, and that was her Circe-like behaviour towards young men. She was there to put young men in their place—in the sty.

She swept into the room with her charming, irresponsible laugh, and rudely stopped to listen to the "high-brow" conversation between Gombarov and Marianne; then, with feigned contempt, moved away and shouted to Bayliss:

"Come, Bayley, and spout to me about Ibsen and Tur-jeneff. I've only got as far as Robert Chambers and O. Henry. I did read Shakespeare—he's a nice kid, and I like him. There, be a good boy, Bayley, and complete my education!" and she went up to Bayliss and stroked his cheek. "Yes, do, Bayley, put me through a few literary stunts. Give me the least chance, and I shall do the literary loop-the-loop with the best of them. See if I don't!" she went on appealingly.

Her audience laughed uproariously. Everyone knew that she was hitting at Marianne, whom she intensely disliked.

"Yes, do, Bayley, be a dear," she repeated, and stroked his cheek a second time; whereupon Bayliss seized her hand and gripped it tightly, causing her to wince, and to bend her body into an attractive curve. "You're hurting me!" she exclaimed.

"I'm only human," retorted Bayliss, without releasing her. Everyone laughed.

"John, help me!" shouted Muriel.

Again there was an outburst of mirth; this time because everyone knew that Gombarov and Miss Perkins had previously exchanged hardly more than half a dozen words, and this sudden intimacy was as incongruous as all of Muriel's actions. They formed such an impossible contrast. Her action was interpreted as an opening assault for the capture of Gombarov's heart, doubtless for the adding to her already large collection; a hobby she followed as others stamp- or butterfly-collecting. Gombarov's heart would be a unique specimen; for he passed in the crowd as a man of intellect. Possibly, there was at the bottom of this a touch of jealousy, a touch of that acquisitorial sense in women, which is very pleasurable, especially when it operates to deprive another, in this case Marianne, who was richer in her following of intellectual young men; wherefore Miss Perkins detested her.

John was hardly less astonished than the others. Naturally shy, he was embarrassed, and did not know how to respond to Muriel's cry for help. He felt, however, that it was a test of himself in a petty crisis; so gathering up courage, he said, "All right, Muriel!"—whereupon everyone laughed again, this time at his intimacy—and seized hold of her other hand; the struggle developed into a tug-of-war between Gombarov and Bayliss, each pulling the other way.

"That's not the way to help me, John!" cried Muriel, convulsed with laughter. "You are only helping to tear me in two. Get hold of me properly!"

What did she mean? For an instant Gombarov was undecided what to do; in the same instant Bayliss, doubled with laughter, suddenly let go of Muriel's hand, precipitating her into Gombarov's arms. She rested there a moment, long enough to waft the delicious scent of her hair up his nostrils; then dashed at Bayliss, with the words:

"You thought you were smart, didn't you?"

" I was merely trying to do you a favour," protested Bayliss.

" And you are a nice helper!" said Muriel, turning upon Gombarov who thought her petulance extremely becoming, and was lost for speech.

" Am I in love with her? " asked Gombarov of himself.

As if she had overheard his thought, Muriel burst into a delicious, otherwise inexplicable laugh.

From her corner Marianne watched the whole scene with curious eyes.

The next half-hour passed very pleasantly, until Gombarov, looking at his watch, said:

" I must go back to that blasted office. I still have some work to do."

" Do stay. You are too conscientious," urged Muriel.

Gombarov was in the penultimate heaven of delight.

" I'd like to," he replied sadly, " but it's work for to-morrow's paper, and simply has got to be done." And he put his hat on.

" I think I've got to be going, too," said Miss Edgar, whose existence he had quite forgotten.

They walked out together; Gombarov wishing her in some place where the weather is exceeding hot. As they walked along the narrow back streets he gnashed his teeth, and she saw him do it. They talked, she polysyllabically, he monosyllabically. It was quite dark now; the neighbourhood was deserted; an idea came into Gombarov's head. It was worth trying. Usually timid, he thought there was no danger in offending a person one didn't like. He moved his right arm and put it around Miss Edgar's waist.

" No, you don't," said Miss Edgar, disengaging herself, and showing no acceleration in her voice. " I am not that kind of a girl."

" What kind of a girl are you? " he asked in a brusque manner unusual to him. Her drawl had quite exhausted his patience. He thought: had nature provided her with this exasperating manner in order that she might exasperate some male into beating her? Her life was dull and boring, and her drawling soul yearned, perhaps even unknown to herself, for a beating. He must speak about it to Max Horwitz, who had read Freud and knew all the latest German theories on such subjects. In the meanwhile, receiving no answer to his question from

Miss Edgar, he said "Good night," and walked away. His mind and heart were filled with a vision: of the sinuous figure of Muriel felinely sidling up and adjusting itself to his own; and the thought filled him with divine madness.

IV

As luck would have it, he found Max Horwitz waiting for him at the office. He broached Miss Edgar's case at once, without mentioning her name.

"Undoubtedly," said Horwitz, "she wants a beating. She probably comes of a family which had several generations of gentlemen in it who spared their womenfolk, and even worshipped them. Now the primitive woman wants to be beaten. Several generations of repression in this direction have now come to a head. She wants a beating badly. Consider, for instance, the case of the Russian peasant women who are beaten by their husbands. Once their husband stops beating them, they get very jealous, and imagine that he is beating some other woman."

Gombarov was astonished at the seriousness with which Horwitz had considered the problem; he chuckled at the explanation, and merely remarked:

"Well, those Germans are clever fellows! They have a reason for everything."

At the same time he thought: "There is an element of plausibility in the theory as far as Miss Edgar is concerned."

For a moment his thoughts flitted tenderly to Muriel. His mind was already beginning to erect a pedestal for her. All other women had lost their meaning for him.

CHAPTER VII

I

GOMBAROV, owing to his long newspaper experience, was very useful to Marianne in her new work, and was a prop in the discouragements which overtake the beginner. He, moreover, conscious of a certain responsibility, accompanied her, when time permitted, on some of her late assignments in the more remote, even dangerous parts of the city.

Though she at first appeared to appreciate his sacrifices, he noted a change in her manner as the weeks passed by. She appeared to resent his kindness and used the most petty excuse for showing her annoyance. He remembered the very first time it happened. He was talking about Dostoevsky.

"I don't agree with you at all about him," said Marianne. "I think Turgenev is much the finer writer." Her tone was sharp and provocatory.

He did not then know that when a bookish woman wants to break with a man, she begins by attacking his taste in books.

He was soon to learn that Marianne had another interest in life, to wit, a middle-aged male colleague, who served as the ship-news reporter on the *Morning Newsmonger*. He saw them one day, by chance, walking in one of the side streets, her arm in his. He knew Mr Merton well. He was a commonplace little man, whose interests in life did not go beyond the bounds of his profession; wherefore he was very useful to his newspaper. Nor was there anything either Apollonian or Napoleonic in his appearance. The most that could be said of him was that he was impressive by his unimpressiveness. Doubtless he lived up to the moral qualities demanded by Marianne.

It was incredibly ironic, quite beyond Gombarov's powers of comprehension. Moreover, he was hurt. He had been a friend to her, and he now missed those pleasant Saturday afternoons he used to spend with her. The first week or two of his abstention from her company was very hard for him. Above all, he was hurt by the knowledge that such things could happen. This hurt remained with him.

II

He had not seen Muriel for a fortnight after the encounter at the studio. His visits to the Art School, where he hoped to meet her—as it were, by chance—had been fruitless. At last, one evening he was rewarded. He visited the sketch-class while Mr Barfus was criticising the sketches on the board. When Gombarov joined the little crowd of students who surrounded Barfus, the latter was discussing a sketch in oils done by Muriel. " Not much in the way of drawing," he was saying, " but as a piece of colour it sings; if it were stood on its head it would sing equally well "—and by way of illustration Mr Barfus turned the picture upside-down, which caused a titter to go through the class. Really, the picture looked just as well upside-down: some thought it looked *better*; that was, of course, going too far; but surely, if any person could make things look better upside-down, it was Muriel. Mr Barfus then put up the picture on its sides, now on one, now on the other, with the same result. " It's the extreme test of painting," went on Mr Barfus, " when, irrespective of the subject, it looks good on all sides."

" So does Perky," said a male voice in an audible enough whisper, which caused some giggling among those who had heard. " Perky," it goes without saying, was the name by which Miss Perkins was known at school.

Muriel, indeed, " looked good " from whatever angle one contemplated her. Gombarov watched her over the heads of others, though she had not yet seen him. She sat on a low chair, her clasped hands round her hunched-up knees; attired in a close-fitting black dress, the revealed lines of her body were natural and expressive, stays and the like having no part in their formation. Out of this black dress emerged the curve of a white neck; and topping this neck, a looming black coiffure, such as one sees on women in Japanese prints. She tried to look unconcerned while Barfus was criticising her picture, but the effort was visible.

" This is not the sort of work that wins prizes," went on Mr Barfus in his epigrammatic way, " because such work is, in its way, its own prize. If this student would only learn how to draw—well, there's no telling how far

she would go. Of course," added Mr Barfus—and it was hard to tell whether he was speaking seriously or in sarcasm—" of course. a new school has arisen in Europe, under a painter named Matisse, which has discarded drawing; at all events, drawing as we understand it. They appear to be weary of the ways of civilisation, and say they want to draw like children or savages. The queer part of it is that Matisse himself and two or three others of the group can draw, and they have deliberately forsaken the accepted form of draughtsmanship; from which I would judge that there's some method in their madness. But the author of this picture has not discarded drawing. She simply cannot draw. But she has colour . . ."

The criticism finished, Muriel seized her sketch, put it away in her locker, and ran into the dressing-room. When she came out again, her head encased in a pretty little fur cap, her shoulders and neck framed in a fur boa, she suddenly saw Gombarov standing in the corridor leading to the exit. His heart beat hard on her approach. She greeted him with a loud laugh. It was the sort of laugh one laughs upon suddenly being confronted with something extremely ridiculous. With equal suddenness she stopped laughing.

" Oh, it's you!" she exclaimed. " You've thought of looking me up at last? Or is it someone else you've come to see? If you tell me who, I'll find her for you." And again she laughed.

" It's you I've come to see," replied Gombarov.

" Really me? Well, don't be slow. Come along!"—and, putting her arm through his, half-imperiously, half-tenderly, Muriel had him out in the street before he could collect his wits.

He did not know where he was being taken. They walked fast, Muriel setting the pace; and when they came to street crossings, she would seize his hand and trip across, pulling him along with her.

Once across, she would pause for an instant to survey him roguishly, and say: " Well, you are slow. Come a-long!" And she would continue her mad pace. But though they walked fast, she no less rapidly unravelled a thread of talk, yards and yards of it, in which her escort was quickly being entangled. Her talk was fast, delicious and alive; it gurgled out of her throat—champagne out of a bottle; there was no stopping it—there was no reason

for stopping it; it was full of nonsense and jests and irrelevancies. Gombarov listened to it as one listens to music, without any desire to put in a phrase of his own. As if he could, if he wanted to! He felt himself carried along as on a fast moving vehicle, the motion itself of which was pleasant, and there was no desire to stop anywhere, however pleasant the places might be. But suddenly she pulled up and said reproachfully:

"Well, John, you haven't said a word!"

"I'd rather listen to you," he said truthfully.

"I know—you are studying me—for your books," she observed suddenly.

"No—no! I'm not!" he protested. "I was enjoying your talk for its own sake. Really! It's such a relief after the high-brow talk one has heard."

"Ah, I see," she retorted; "you think me a light-headed woman!"

"No, no, I did not mean it that way," he protested again. "I do not think you at all a frivolous person. I real-ly l-like you . . ."

"Really? Do you like me better than Miss Kent? She's intellectual, you know; I should say, more your kind."

"No, no; I'm quite done with her."

"She hasn't chucked you, has she?"

"There's never been anything between us."

"You haven't kissed her?" persisted Muriel.

Gombarov was just about to say "No," when it suddenly occurred to him that he was really ashamed of not having kissed Marianne; so he remained gloomily silent.

Muriel laughed in a tantalising way.

Something like madness seized Gombarov suddenly; but his caution did not quite desert him; after looking round carefully and seeing no one about, he quickly put his arm round Muriel's neck and kissed her violently on her lips, while she struggled to draw away.

"That wasn't a nice kiss," said Muriel. "It was as if a tiger sprang at me. Is that the way you kissed Miss Kent?"

"I never kissed her."

"No wonder she wouldn't have anything to do with you."

Gombarov didn't quite know whether Muriel meant that Marianne wouldn't have anything to do with him because

he had never kissed her, or because he kissed like that. He couldn't quite make her out. Was she offended with him? Did he hazard future developments by acting thus precipitately?

"This is where I catch my trolley," she said, pausing at the corner, and there was nothing in her voice to tell him whether she was angry or not. The trolley was just coming up, and he wondered whether she would allow him to accompany her after that. She jumped on, and looking round and seeing him hesitate, she said: "Come on, you silly; be quick!"

The trolley was crowded and there was no chance to talk. He was not a little thankful for this. Owing to their having to stand up, she leant lightly against him, and the feeling of her closeness was pleasurable; while the fur of her boa brushed his cheek; there was an aliveness about this fur, and it gave him the strange feeling that it belonged not to some animal but was her very own; her beautiful sidling feline movements strengthened this feeling. Now he doubted no longer: he was fiercely in love with her, with her beautiful animalism, before the silent onslaughts of which Marianne's "high-browism" receded more and more and became a vanishing, dissipated cloud. He felt a heat and a sacredness in this new flame, to which, could he but find a whole-hearted response, he might in their joint force find a fulcrum for moving his particular world. But life had taught him not to take the other for granted; doubtless, in spite of the fierceness of her own flame, Muriel had not so much a protective as a deadening shell around her, which, for the want of a better word, might be called the Puritanic shell, keeping her own flame within bounds, burning inwardly, and resulting now and then in gorgeous splashes on canvas, partial emanations of spirit, which, as Mr Barfus pointed out, "looked good" whichever way you looked at them. But what a force, what a flame, what a sacredness there could be if the two flames, his and hers, fused; of what power of creativeness they would be capable! Thought of his past experiences, however, made him sad, rendered him helpless, incapable of taking the moment to the full and of the joy her presence gave him.

"Come on!" He again heard her laughing voice, which sent his thoughts scampering to all the devils; and he felt her hand upon his conducting him through the crowded car. Presently, her arm on his, he found

himself before a large cemetery, the iron rails of which closed in a complete square.

"I live just around the corner," said Muriel; "but let's walk a while."

"It's a nice place you've brought me to!" laughed Gombarov.

"I thought you'd like it," said Muriel. "It must be quite in tune with your thoughts in the trolley." And she laughed elfishly. "You might tell me what you were thinking about. I suppose, about supermen and all that tosh."

"No, not about supermen, but about superwomen," retorted Gombarov.

"And what's that?" asked Muriel, showing her teeth.

"That's easy," replied Gombarov. "A superwoman is a woman with the most woman in her."

"I wouldn't advise you to meet one. You'd soon get sick of her." This time she laughed quite outrageously. "Have you ever met one?"

"I am not certain," he said significantly.

In reply, she began to sing a song popular just then, which ended in the refrain: "Poor John!"

There was no getting around her. He laughed in admission of her triumph, which he did not mind at all. She was delicious.

"I say, Muriel," he suddenly asked. "Whatever made you take up with a fellow like me? We are different in so many ways. I'm a little afraid of you."

"You see," she said, "I can't help being affectionate to dumb animals."

Hand in hand, they laughed like children.

"You are a jewel, Muriel," he persisted, after a silence. "But that's not an answer; it's an excuse."

"Well, if you'd like to know, it's because you've got such nice eyebrows. Are there any more eyebrows like yours in your family?"

"You are laughing at me!" And he attempted to kiss her but she drew her face to one side.

"You will think I am encouraging you," she said. "But I must be going in. Good-bye!" She suddenly put his hand to her lips and kissed it. "Meet me at the next sketch-class about the same time!" And off she ran.

He watched her turning the corner, and casting an elfish look behind. He stood there immovably, alone.

III

"An elf, if there ever was one!" he thought her, as he was walking home. A real elf that one might pursue around a tree; whom, after one has caught, all flurried and panting, one might kiss and fondle to one's heart's content; all the wisdom in the world had not succeeded in drying up the springs of life, but had only caused them to run in subterranean channels. There she was, an elf, who had aroused the noble satyr in him: that being in him that was half-savage, half-child.

At this thought there suddenly came into his mind the words he heard Barfus utter that evening with regard to Matisse and his followers: "They want to paint like savages or children."

He was about to blow out the candle in his attic before retiring, but paused quite suddenly. "Is it possible . . ." he thought, "is it possible that these men, these artists who could draw in the ordinary way but would not, were also troubled by a longing for a more full and natural life, and that they took this means to express their protest against a sophisticated, mechanical civilisation, which had been corrupted by false ideals?" He had seen reproductions of some of these revolutionary works, and he had to admit that they were beyond his comprehension. But Barfus had said that there must be some method in their madness, and Barfus was not a man to say a thing lightly. He stood there and wondered. . . .

Then, as if moved by the vigour of his thought, he blew energetically at the candle-flame, and was in darkness. His eyes clove the darkness like lightning, his mind was a ball of flame; while in his heart an elf circled round and round; there was no rest for him that night.

CHAPTER VIII

I

DREAM alternated with nightmare for Gombarov during the next few months. Life had become a skyscraper, in which the elevator took you to the seventh storey of delight, and having, through the gates, given you a glimpse of what the seventh storey of delight was like, quite suddenly dropped you to the seventh cellar of woe, of which you were allowed to have more than a glimpse. And the sole manipulator of this singular device was Muriel Perkins.

If he loved her more for one than another thing, it was her elfishness; and this elfishness was the cause of both his joy and misery. There was one sort of elfishness for his pleasure, another for his annoyance. What the ironic gods gave with one hand they took away with the other. Her aliveness stirred the creative fires in him; but immediately afterwards she turned her white magic to black, and sent down a heavy shower to put these fires out.

He had prepared such a fine pedestal for her, draped her in so many beautiful illusions. But if she was an elf, there was no keeping an elf on a pedestal. No sooner had he arranged her there nicely, than off she flopped in her elfish way, scattering the illusions he had attached to her, as it were, a Salome shedding her seven veils. So he fluttered between his beliefs and doubtings. Had he been better versed in elfology, he might have employed more blunt, more masterly tactics; he would have made her a part of him; she would have been as an Ariel to his Prospero, subject to his every whim, not he to hers. He would have withheld his illusions from her, made her beg for them; for she had an inordinate admiration for his brain, and would have valued the gifts it conferred upon her: had he only been less lavish. In spite of his gallant and generous inclinations towards Muriel, and his desire to instil feelings of equality and camaraderie into her, moments came with more than a vague glimmering of the truth: that, however much our Puritans, Platonists and "male blue-stockings," not excluding men of genius

like Ibsen, may desire, there was no subverting the natural law: man's joy in his mastery, woman's joy in being mastered. In one such mood, he wrote Muriel a letter in which, not without veiled allusions and ironicisms, he gently reproached her for giving way to the temptation of showing her worst side and keeping her potential virtues well concealed. Never for a moment had he doubted the presence of an integral fineness under her mask of irresponsible and sometimes perverse frivolity.

Her response was so characteristic of her. "Your letter was so full of beautiful points!" she wrote in the course of it. "I writhed with pleasure. It was so full of tributes (which, I am afraid, are personal sacrifices) to the charms of (John's) Muriel. But, instead of laying them at my feet, you drop them heavily on my toes, and I smile most ruefully. . . . To be explicit, your letter contained at least a dozen sarcasms, over which, scenting a battle, I chuckled; but they were such sad penetrations into the frailty of 'poor Muriel.' All of which only adds to the conceit of the elf, who is, above all, fuzzy-brained, a jeering, unrefined thing where fine things are concerned. And you, with your doubts coming first, are lastly and properly disillusioned! I don't quite see why you helped yourself to an illusion in the beginning. Perhaps, now that it is dispersed like a foreign-made veil dropping from a master creation, you will know the ugly, true elf better (tragic conclusion!) . . . Elves are fanciful things, aren't they? What are they like when they get old? And are they very changeable? If so, you could hardly keep *one* of them lodged securely in a frame. (Is it a fitting frame, think you?) . . . Yes, let's go to the theatre on Thursday, and laugh."

A letter such as this only confirmed his admiration of her. His own wit was sharpened by these contacts, and his letters to her assumed at times a humour, offensive and defensive, of which he would have been incapable some months before. On the other hand, he had introduced her to modern literature; and all she read she not only understood but used against him. From the love-poems of Arthur Symons and Dowson and Yeats and Swinburne she learnt how imaginative lovers may be disappointed; and she abused her fresh knowledge in a masterly fashion. When Gombarov became aware of this, he tried a counter-stroke to divert her adaptable

imagination, by procuring her books which would re-act favourably upon their relations. His stratagem succeeded beyond his expectations.

He began by procuring a copy of Vernon Lee's "Vanitas," which contains studies of two or three frivolous women; that is to say, women whose frivolous masks conceale[illegible] abysmal profundity. Before long, through a girl intimate of Muriel's, Gombarov, without giving his secret away, learned that Muriel fell into the trap and was fancying herself as Lady Tal; Gombarov, of course, to her mind was the only person who saw her in her true light.

He next tried a bolder stroke, when he let her have "The Tragic Comedians," by George Meredith. Again it answered Oscar Wilde's test of the suggestibility of literature, of the power of literature in projecting itself into life. This time she had become the beautiful Princess, waiting to be carried away against the will of her parents by the brilliant Jew Alvan. As a matter of fact, Gombarov had never been to Muriel's house, nor met her parents. They held hands in theatres and at the "movies"; and on escorting her home they made love—or hate—in innumerable circuits of the cemetery already mentioned. They fell quite naturally into the tragi-comedy; but from Muriel's point of view there was one essential factor lacking: a thoroughly commonplace rival to Gombarov in quest of her affections. She soon saw that this want was supplied. . . . Gombarov's plan had succeeded beyond his expectations, and, needless to say, beyond his desire.

II

Thomas Duncan—the same "Tommy" who had a studio next to Bayliss's—had for a long time been sending shy, timid glances in Muriel's direction; and one day his patient vigil was rewarded by Muriel taking his arm, in Gombarov's presence, and going off to the theatre with him. From that day, Tommy made his presence more and more frequent; and sometimes, at Muriel's suggestion, joined them in their outings, to Gombarov's annoyance.

On being reproached by Gombarov, Muriel would reply:

"He's a mere child. I am sorry for him."

In other words, she "couldn't help feeling affectionate towards dumb animals." There was danger in that for Gombarov, who was now far from dumb.

The situation developed in an impossible but common enough fashion. She would alternate her favours between them. One never knew whose turn it was to be favoured. Now one of them would stay away from sheer spleen, now the other. It was hard to stay away from her. Her method of reconciliation was feline. If, after several days' absence on Gombarov's part, she met him, she would reproach him for his neglect and sidle up to him both physically and by means of words. There was no resisting her when she decided to be charming. She would stay charming several days at a time, until she met the other absentee; and the performance would be repeated. How many times he had resolved not to go back to her! Not that she was an exception to the rule. He had seen other girls at the Art School engage at the same game, of playing up one rival against another; and he was led to conclude that this waywardness on their part was not an abnormal phenomenon but purely a normal feminine ebullience of spirits, with which he must be reconciled, or else resist altogether the magnetic attraction that drew him towards a woman. But if this attraction was irresistible, how could he resist it? There was no putting wax in one's ears as did Odysseus' men to withstand the call of the Sirens.

But he and Tommy met sometimes and discussed the matter quite amicably; in a way that would be impossible for two women in a similar situation. Their conferences usually ended in an agreement to present ultimata. It became a game of love by ultimatum. Every week or so, alternately or simultaneously, the lovers presented their ultimata to "Perky," who was urged to make a final choice between them. Nothing daunted, Muriel, on the occasion of her birthday, presented her lovers with an ultimatum of her own: she exhorted each one of them, if he truly loved her, to demonstrate his love by presenting her with a French poodle on her birthday.

Her birthday came, but no French poodle; and things were very much as before.

III

When spring came again, Gombarov was still immersed in his family troubles, his recurring desire to go to London, and his love for Muriel. He was at this time willing to sacrifice London for Muriel. Yet both seemed equally distant.

Muriel had gone away for a three weeks' holiday to the country. Their last meeting was not a happy one. He appeared to flounder helplessly in the morasses of life; and there was nothing joyous, nothing heroic in life to relieve its monotony. There was a tragic miasma about his home, and its fumes threatened to overcome him. He was too restless to lie down and die. He did not want to die. Not just yet. But the fury rising out of his discontent threatened to split him. He craved for pity, the pity of some eternal mother. One can immerse oneself to forgetfulness in great things, but not in a sea of banality. And so, in his spare moments, he walked in the parks, and now and then fixed his eyes on the flowers with a strange intentness. "The flowers"—he thought—"they wake in the morning; they have their bath of dew; then all day they open out to the light and warmth of the sun; they close up at night again and sleep." One knew what was the natural life of a flower. But what was the natural life of a man or a woman? His own needs were simple enough. His mind had rigidly reduced them to work—of his own choice—and a woman; and the word "love" included both. Yet simple things appeared to be elusive, owing to the way in which the world was constituted; men appeared to have lost all sense of the simple, and were quite unable to understand simple things. Were not the great passions at bottom the same as they were two thousand years ago? Was not the three-headed dragon of money, power and sex still the ruler of the world? Only the head representing money had grown larger; for with money one could obtain both power and a woman. Was a Napoleon of Finance more noble than a Napoleon of War? Men liked to think that was "progress." Was he, Gombarov, wrong, and the world right? Strange what thoughts innocent little flowers should bring into one's head! And yet, he reflected, as he watched the flowers, he had at least one supporter who

had to be reckoned with, to whom even a Napoleon of Finance presumed to do tribute. "Consider the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin. . . ." The most simple, the most truthful, the most beautiful words ever said, went by unheeded. But that someone in the world was on his side gave Gombarov faith, and this faith gave him an impulse to action. He would ask for a week's holiday to go to his sister, who now lived in the country, for he needed rest; and on the way he would drop off and see Muriel and have a decisive talk with her. He would speak frankly and reasonably; he would tell her of the sacredness of his feelings, that things could not go on as they did; in short, would she marry him?

IV

Gombarov, leaning back in his seat in the train, watching the fields pass by, was wrapped in a romantic radiance that comes of heroic decisions; there suddenly swept across this light a clouded sword; as it were, cutting his world in two. This was the realism of his problem: his economic circumstances; and the sheer banality of this problem did not make it less formidable. There was no seizing it, like the proverbial bull, by the horns. It had neither horns nor tail; neither eyes nor ears; neither passions nor perceptions; it was a huge, slimy, loathsome beast; legless and shapeless; a kind of colossal slug, lying mountain-like across one's path and barring one's progress, breathing its poisonous miasma out of its far stretching, all-consuming mouth; overcoming men by its mere breath and leaving prostrate with weariness all who presume to try its prowess. Its hostile shadow cutting across Gombarov's happy vision forced upon him a feeling of utter helplessness.

But he was young; in his way a child; with a child's feelings of hope, a child's belief in miracles and enchantments; the ogre undoubtedly existed in life as in fairy-tales, and at some time or other the ogre would be slain. For the while he disregarded the ogre and thought only of one thing: of finding the White Princess and convincing her that he was the White Prince; for he was enchanted and was not what he seemed.

As he was nearing his destination he let his mind dwell

on the method of proposal. It occurred to him that if he told her his thoughts, the thoughts which had induced him to come, she might merely give way to her elfin laughter; his keen sense of the ridiculous made him cautious. He hated having to be cautious. Could he but fall humbly, a suppliant at her feet, confess to her, bare his heart freely and unreservedly, offer himself up to her, for her to do what she would with him, since he could not live without her, since to live without her was one maddening torment not to be borne lightly, even with all his capacity for endurance! If he thus put himself wholly at her mercy, would she understand; or would she take advantage of it by placing a conquering foot on his neck? Must he then be arrogant, press his virtues upon her, prevail upon her by sheer force of argument? Must he drop honesty and adopt policy? That was what Bayliss had advised him to do with regard to women: and Bayliss, who was as straightforward and honest as anyone he had met, was not above using policy in his relations with the other sex; was, moreover, successful. This idea went against Gombarov's grain. Besides, to carry out a policy successfully, one must present a mask of expression and gesture which would not reveal the contradiction with what was beneath the mask.

He was in the midst of his thoughts when the train drew up at the station, and, looking out of the window, he saw three handkerchiefs waving at him from the platform. Muriel, having received his wire, was there; beside her were her two cronies, Miss Woden and Miss Clark.

"It was so good of you to come," said Muriel, who appeared genuinely glad to see him. She had not seen either him or Tommy for more than a fortnight. This mood cheered him for his evening's ordeal.

"Come and have supper with us," said Miss Woden. "It's only a scrap supper: some cold meat and salad. You don't mind?"

During supper, while they were talking and laughing, he managed to whisper to Muriel:

"My last train goes at eleven. I would like a talk with you."

"I'll let you two do the washing-up to-night," said Muriel, after supper, putting a wrap on her shoulders and taking Gombarov's arm, "while I go out and entertain the guest."

The evening was cool; for some moments they walked in silence, she tenderly clinging to his arm as if for warmth.

"I say, Muriel," he said at last, "I've been thinking matters over. Things cannot go on as they are. . . ." He grappled hard for phrases. "I won't say that I cannot live without you. . . ."

"You haven't come all this way to tell me that?" she laughed.

"But I need you, all the same, and I need you badly . . . for myself . . . for my work. . . . When I call you elf, I don't do it in a narrow sense; but you are to me a kind of life, the best part of life . . ."

"I suppose," interjected Muriel with a laugh, "when you are sad, you will be reclining in a recess on cushions and expect me to dance for you."

"Not a bad idea," laughed Gombarov. "I'm sure no one could do it so nicely."

She clung more tenderly to him, and they laughed like children.

"I like to see you laugh like that," she said. "Your face, so serious at one moment, entirely changes expression, and becomes a laughing mask. Frankly, I sometimes don't understand you. It is as if there were two different beings in you; and one of them I'm afraid of. There are moments when I'm fonder of you than of anyone I know; again there are times when you make me want to run away from you. I feel as if there were something in you ready to spring at me."

"Afraid of me!" exclaimed Gombarov in amazement. "I thought it was the other way round. I never feel that, I'm sure. It may be because life has been very hard on me, and has bent me, and crushed me, and thwarted me. I sometimes feel all on fire, as if I were burning up. You can save me, if you will."

"My dear," she said, putting an arm around him, "I know; I know. Don't think I don't understand or appreciate how you've cared for me, and protected me, and taught me things. Do you think we are fitted for one another? You sometimes have such a tortured look, which frightens me."

"You will remember," replied Gombarov, "that Meredith makes Alvan say: 'We Jews are a parable people.' Well, I am a Jew, and I'll put the case in a

parable for you. What is the actual difference between you and me? Let me put it this way: Here in America people wear fur overcoats, often with the fur on the outside. In Russia they also wear fur overcoats, and the fur is always on the inside. So outwardly you are gay, and I've heard people call you frivolous; and yet I know that inwardly you are not that. Why, I've heard you sum up a book or a person in a phrase which yards of solemn talk couldn't better. Again, some people think me sad, solemn, austere, a regular monk; yet I feel inside of me that, given the least chance, I could outlaugh them all. I wear my fur on the inside, that's all. What could not you and I do together! Separately, each of us may be wasted." His voice was enthusiastic, at the same time pleading.

"I know, my dear, I know," she repeated. "There is another thing you've just mentioned, your being a Jew. I personally don't hold that up against you. You are the finest man I have ever known; but there are my parents: what will they say to my marrying a Jew?"

"Well, I've almost forgotten that myself. But I won't press you to give me an answer now," he concluded. "Think it over. Give me an answer, say in a week from to-day. . . . Then you can tell me whether you have decided to make me a citizen of hell or heaven. . . ."

"Which is which?" asked Muriel tantalisingly, and held up her face to him. He kissed her lips and found a response in them. Then, with a wild impulse, he flung himself down and kissed first her knees, then her ankles. He felt her hand on his shoulder.

"Get up, you silly; you'll spoil the crease in your trousers." She brushed him when he got up. "What will you look like when you get to your sister's?" Her lips were again dangerously near, and he kissed them.

"Oh, by the way," she suddenly exclaimed. "You've never met my mother, have you?"

"No. Why?" A terrible vision rose before him of having to go through the customary formality.

"Nothing, my dear, except she's fat!"

"But I have no intention of marrying your mother," said he, much relieved.

"Don't you understand, my dear? I take after her. Some day I'll get fat too. What will you call your elf

then? An elephant, I suppose?" She went into peals of laughter at her own joke.

And so they walked on, and talked and laughed, and though she withheld the word, he tacitly felt that she agreed and that she was his. He suddenly pulled out his watch.

She released his arm and looked at him. "You are a nice lover!" she said, half-tauntingly, half-reproachfully.

"But, my dear," he hastened to excuse himself, "you know that my last train goes in a quarter of an hour, that there's not an hotel within ten miles, and look at the sky; it's drizzling already. Moreover, I'm not at all familiar with the roads hereabouts. Still, I don't mind," he added philosophically. "I'll stay as long as you like."

"Oh, no! It was thoughtless of me," she exclaimed, seizing his arm once more, and turning with him stationwards.

They were none too soon there; the train was just steaming in. Another minute, and it puffed out again. Gombarov watched out of the window until he could no longer see the little waving patch of white on the platform.

V

A few days later, while at his sister's, a letter reached Gombarov from Muriel, who was back in town.

"Come back soon, my dear," it said; "I'm impatient to see you. On Wednesday the scholarships will be awarded, as usual, to a lot of addlepates. And I shall especially need your sympathy. . . . I suppose you are delighted with this, and I wish you, like Hawthorne's 'Great Stone Face,' might steadily and without a word instil the peace and the cool brow which comes of knowing and loving the world. Of course, you know we've all flunked . . . you must play the rôle of kind mourner . . . what I would like to know is—that if you know any 'mother' verses that sing quaintly and untiringly—or perhaps meaningless, funny little 'petal' songs, which seem to our cotton brains soaked with tears like touches of pitying child-fingers—you will please rock me to sleep with them. (This is rot, of course.)" And the letter ended, doubtless half-seriously, half-mockingly,

" Feel awfully sleepy, so ' until death do us part,' lovingly, Muriel."

Gombarov, elated at this tender attitude on his elf's part, replied that he would be in town by Wednesday and that he would get tickets for the theatre for the same evening.

VI

On Wednesday Gombarov went for lunch to the usual restaurant, and just as he was leaving, he encountered Tommy. After greetings were over, Tommy suddenly asked him:

" Did Muriel tell you? "

" Tell me what? "

" That three weeks ago, just before she left for the country, I proposed to her, and was accepted."

Gombarov grew faint; but controlling himself, said in a dull voice:

" Thanks for telling me. Good-bye." And walked away.

VII

He did not want to believe it. He must have the truth from Muriel's own mouth. Perhaps Tommy had told the truth, but Muriel had reconsidered. He waited impatiently for the time of his meeting with her. His face was dark when at last he encountered her at Bayliss's studio. Muriel greeted him with a cry of delight, but stopped short.

" Is it true what Tommy has told me? " he asked her sullenly; while Bayliss, scenting trouble, discreetly left the room.

There was no reply.

" Is it true? " he repeated.

Again she was silent. He handed her the theatre tickets.

" But I can't go alone," she said.

" Very well, then!"—and he tore the tickets, and dropped the bits on the floor. " Good-bye."

" John!" she shouted after him, as he reached the door.

" What is it? There's nothing more to be said, is there? "

" I can't let you go like this. I really and truly think you the finest person I have ever met."

" You've shown it, haven't you? " he said, with a sad smile.

" I can't explain now," she replied. " But you ought to be glad. Some day you will be glad. I'm not really worthy of you; really I'm not. And you have your work. You'll do big things. You are greater than any of us. . . ." She seized hold of one of his hands and kissed it. She tried to hold it, but he withdrew it.

" Good-bye," he said, and walked rapidly down the stairs.

A demoniac fury drove him along the streets for hours; and pain and humiliation and sadness were the combustible ingredients of this fury, which now and then burst in a fast shower of tears, diverting his course from the brilliantly lit streets into dark back lanes, where none might witness his unmanned shame. And the whole stone city appeared to him as one vast cage, a maze of walls, and whichever way he walked there was no way out.

At one moment he ran into a Salvation Army meeting. A young man held forth on how he had been saved from a life of sin, of how he had heard the voice of God at the very instant he had his hand in another man's pocket. His recital of his salvation was followed by a tall, pale female colleague stepping forth into the centre, and singing in a loud, raucous voice, " Oh, where is my wandering boy to-night? " Each stanza was followed by the whole choir singing, accompanied at psychological moments by the tooting of a trumpet and the beating of a drum.

" Apparently," reflected Gombarov, as he walked away, " I don't belong to that class of unfortunates who can be saved by bad music."

Oh, if there were only somewhere some great, pitiful, abstract mother, whose knees he might embrace, clinging, in whose lap he might rest his head, and whose fingers might soothe and assuage the flames which were fiercely burning without burning themselves out.

VIII

At last, after three hours, the hurricane of his spirit abated, and he bethought himself of his friend Bayliss, the only person who might comfort him. He betook him-

self to Bayliss's route, and was soon rewarded by the appearance of Bayliss's trolley, which luckily was quite empty. He jumped on, and without a word took the corner seat nearest to the platform. Bayliss was quick to see that his friend was unable to talk; so he put a hand on his shoulder and said:

"Really, my friend, I congratulate you. She isn't worth it, and you are well rid of her. You must look at things in the long run. She'd always be a hindrance, a thorn in your side. You deserve something better. She is charming and fascinating, but she belongs to the race of Circe; if you give them the least chance, they turn you into swine. . . ."

"What is one to do?" muttered Gombarov. "They seem to be all like that. You know, yourself. There's Roney grovelling before his heart's desire; there's Masters; there's . . ."

"That's true," replied Bayliss. "You must remember that the average American girl is different from the Continental girl, who is loved more and kept in her place more. But the American girl is essentially Circe, which is really the fault of the men, who over-idealise her. You remember what Marianne said: 'Men put women on pedestals, and bow down to them in worship; then they complain if the women step down and put their feet on the necks of the prostrate bodies.'"

"What's one to do, then?"

"One must either leave women alone, or adopt the same measures that Odysseus adopted with regard to the original Circe. One must refuse the offered potion of enchantment, or if one takes it one must do it with one's eyes open. That's what Odysseus did, and when he jumped at her to slay her, 'with a great cry she slid under,' as the narrative says, and was his. . . . That's the moral of the tale, if you like. Then you made another mistake. When 'Perky' asked you about Tommy, you always put in a good word for him, played him up, and 'Perky' has confidence in your sincerity and judgment. She accepted your 'references' with regard to Tommy at their full value. I am in a position to say that Tommy has not done as much for you. He made a great deal of the fact that you had known other women. . . ."

"Must then, one belie one's own nature and not act fair and square?"

Bayliss laughed. "You see the result of acting fair

and square with ' Perky.' But I have something funny to tell you. Tommy thinks you have corrupted ' Perky ' with the books you have given her, and he is now urging her to read Captain Marryat instead of Pater and Wilde and Symons."

This had the intended effect; Gombarov was shaking with laughter.

" Oh, by the way," exclaimed Gombarov. " I have been so busy with telling my troubles that I've quite forgotten to congratulate you on the scholarship. That means, of course," he added sadly, " I shan't see you for some months. That will be hard for me, especially after this affair."

" Yes, to-morrow is my last night at this, thank God!"

The whole night long the two friends journeyed in this fashion, rounding circuit after circuit, stopping long enough at the depôt each time to consume a sandwich and a cup of coffee.

IX

" Perky " was by no means done with him.

Next morning he received a bulky letter from her; she had also enclosed a large butterfly with outspread wings, carefully secured under thin glossed paper, through which the design, with markings as on a beautifully arranged palette, was gorgeously transparent. " The butterfly is me . . ." said the letter . . . " with wide-stretched and pinioned wings, all the colours flaunting and each a satire on the cold, shrinking body. . . . Sentimental? I don't care if I may seem to be. . . . Please go on loving me. . . . After having practically taken care of me, protected me from my frivolity and thoughtlessness, are you now going to ' weaken '? . . . Believe me, Great Heart, a child of yours that you are responsible for . . . All the love and respect I have for my dead brother is yours—truly noble and most honourable! . . . Won't you stay at least *near* me? You don't know how hard it is for me to be fine—easy for you. . . . You, too, need me—for your work. It's conceited of me, of course. . . ." And so on, and so on, in the same fashion.

" Take my advice, and don't go," said Bayliss, to whom he showed the letter. " It's not a question of whether the letter is sincere or not. She has made her choice, but nearly all women like keeping their old lovers near them,

especially if they have been kind to them. It really comes down to this, to quote two lines from Symons:

"'I cannot, having been your lover,
Stoop to become your friend!'"

Nevertheless, Gombarov, by this time filled with pity for her, rejected this counsel, and resumed friendly relations. Perhaps there was also, unconsciously, behind this the eternal hope which never deserts lovers that while there is yet time their love may reconsider, at the last moment turn to them.

X

One evening, a fortnight later, he took Muriel to the theatre to see a "review," the sort to which decent people are compelled to resort to see and hear indecent things denied them in their own homes.

"What have you brought me to?" laughed Muriel, as in one scene some fifty chorus-girls suddenly dropped on their backs and lifted their legs erect into the air, but flimsily attired in skin-coloured tights and belaced white stage knickers, short pink skirts falling back in disarray over the hips; giving the appearance, through half-closed eyes, of so many powder-puffs rather larger than the usual kind.

"Just like you to blame it on me," retorted Gombarov, "after asking me especially to take you."

"Mother and Father went, and they liked it," replied Muriel, laughing. "They're straight-laced Puritans at home, too!"

"That's why they liked it," said Gombarov.

They both felt unrestrained, irresponsible and devilish that evening. She leaned her body against him, pressed his hand passionately, set him all ablaze with want of her; so that in spite of all his resolutions to keep within the bounds of mere friendship, he fiercely responded to her encouraging passion, the thought recurring in his mind:

"She cannot love Tommy very much, if she acts like this with me. Perhaps she really prefers me."

A wordless scene came on, of an underground Parisian cabaret, with an Apache dance in it. Slowly at first, the two figures in black, the girl's bared at the neck and arms—emphasising the whiteness of her—circled to a

strange, half-barbaric, half-civilised music, in a pantomimic passion-dance, which increased in speed and mutual passion, and just as the poised lips met in a fluid, long-pent-up kiss, the jealous rival dashed into the room, drew a knife from the sash round his waist and threw himself at the male dancer, who eluded him and escaped through the door. The new-comer seized the cowering girl, held her body close to him, while her unwilling head fought away from him, and began the steps of the dance, with a peculiar deliberation, a slow, measured frenzy, which gathered speed and force as the dance progressed: it was a dance of love and hate, and a dance of death. The girl could not help but follow the steps of her leader; hers were despairing, imploring gestures; his fierce, unyielding, pitiless. There was a growing fierceness in her miming, and her bodily movements were falling in more and more with his; carried away, as it were, by his passion, and becoming part of it. There was no abating in his hatred, born of love, and it was reaching a crescendo. And in the succumbing his frail partner curved out her panting body towards him, her hair now loose, her face under his, her lips parted to receive the victor's kiss—the kiss of death. No sooner had he plunged the knife into her white, half-open bosom, and fallen in wild remorse upon her prostrate body, than the door swung open and in rushed the rival, with two gendarmes. The curtain fell upon this tableau. The respectable audience applauded. The thing had been very well done.

"Don't! you're hurting me," whispered Muriel, who at the end of the scene gave her companion's hand a vigorous squeeze and received a more vigorous one in return. "I believe," she added, with a tantalising laugh, as he relaxed his hold, "that is how you feel towards me." And she indicated the stage.

How did she know? He did feel like that towards her. What was her object in arousing these feelings, now that in Tommy she had secured her heart's desire? Was she testing him, or was she tired of Tommy and really wanting him? In spite of her remark, she kept hold of his hand and went on leaning against him as before.

Though the way to her house was long, she suggested walking in preference to taking the trolley. She had some reason for this.

"You know," she said, leading up to it, "Tommy and

I are married—secretly, of course. Mind you don't tell anyone." She looked at him to see how he would take it.

"We did it quietly, last Thursday—at Gretna Green." And she laughed tantalisingly.

"You don't say that you are glad," she went on. "Why don't you congratulate me?"

"Because," said Gombarov, with a sadness in his heart which he tried ineffectually to conceal, "I don't believe you."

XI

He could not afterwards recall much of their conversation during that walk. He only remembered that it mainly consisted of a series of prods and feline scratches on her part, and that the last thing he heard as he left her at the door was a laugh, and that he had walked away and kept on walking in a kind of nightmare. He was all confused and unnerved, and only one thing was clear in his mind: Whether she was married to Tommy or not, he would not see her again. So that was the result of his generous offering of friendship! Bayliss was right. No man could offer friendship to a woman in the circumstances. His fresh humiliation was even greater than that he had felt on his discovery of her engagement to Tommy. Now he was so full of the physical essence of her; and he could not rid himself of the tormenting feeling that, following a thwarting, sits on one's spirit: an evil sediment, which works, as it were, chemically for one's confusion and disintegration. He felt angry with Muriel, with himself, with a world in which such things were possible. One regret glided, serpent-like, in and out from among his other thoughts: why had he not clutched her by the throat, if just once, and let her know what he thought of her?

He did not know by what unconscious processes of direction he reached Ninth Street; that part of it, along the railway, which had been raided some months ago by the police; the long stretch of empty, tiny houses, once brothels, now presented a picture of utter desolation, not unlike that of a small town deserted by its population before the advance of an enemy. He now recalled the evening when he and Bayliss passed through this quarter and watched the long line of police patrols lined up along the curb; the houses were brilliantly lit, the doors agape;

and out of the doors, down the steps, poor flimsily dressed women, in night attire, were being led into the patrols; many of them shivered, for the night was cool. There were about a thousand taken, all told. . . . It made an excellent "story" for the morning papers; and good people, having risen from comfortable beds, were pleased at the breakfast-table. There was something to be said for civilisation and the cleaning up of vice. No, they were not like the savages of Africa, who were indeed at a disadvantage, having no brothels to clean up—until civilisation came and supplied the deficiency.

When love does not ennoble, it prostitutes. He too felt besmirched, like those houses; he too felt desolation in his soul; that sediment of foulness and vice, permitting for the time being no admission of new thoughts; just as these houses were open to, but did not admit, new tenants. . . . He was a thing of utter desolation, tenanted but with the ghosts of old thoughts. . . .

He ran rather than walked from this desolation, and one insidious thought took possession of the empty dwelling of his being: Having loved passionately, honourably, with all his soul . . . could he, dare he, do the other? He had long resisted, both when little groups of art students invited him on their expeditions and when the printers at the *New World* organised similar excursions for "seeing life"; even the office-boy's boast of the contraction of a venereal disease as a condition entitling him to having arrived at man's estate had not thus far deterred him from pursuing the straight line of virtue. And it was strange to think that the love he had expected to ennoble him should be the very thing to cause his wavering. . . . And there was that other troubling thought, to which the poet Dowson gave expression in his

"I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion . . ."

Yes, yes . . . he could imagine it was Muriel he was loving.

He soon found himself in a different kind of street, a strangely alive thoroughfare, considering the time of night. Streams of people, mostly men, moved hither and thither; as it were, aimlessly; in the middle of the street as well as on the sidewalks, singly and in groups. There was a hubbub of voices, punctuated now and then by a lewd epithet, an oath, a laugh such as could emanate

only from some banal hell. At intervals feminine figures could be discerned among them, distributed in the moving human stream as sparsely as commas in a sentence. The houses themselves, small and dingy, were yet lit up in a most fantastic fashion; owing to the fact that they were all provided with red blinds; for

> "Scarlet was the colour of the inmates' sin,
> Scarlet was the colour inviting men in."

This in itself gave a curious sense of unreality to the picture; imparted to it a diabolic attractiveness, if you like. Women stood in the doorways or stuck their heads out of the windows and smiled; for the most part they spoke their invitations with their eyes, but occasionally one would hoarsely whisper to some hesitating male: "Come in, darling!" It might well have been a coloured print from Satania, a country not on any map, yet which has been described with such authentic minuteness by doubtless returned, usually black-garbed travellers.

Gombarov lost courage on seeing the great Saturday night mob. He looked round him like one lost. "It's terrible . . . terrible," he mused. "Is it possible that they too have families to support, or that their girls have turned them down? . . . Yes, yes, some of them may be unfortunates, like myself. Otherwise, is it possible that . . ." His musings were interrupted by an appearance which startled him. He stood there for some moments unable to move. . . . Then he made a dash in the direction in which the apparition disappeared, and cried:

"Tommy! Tommy!"

There was no response, and when he turned the corner and looked everywhere, he could see no signs of Tommy. He wished he were sure it was Tommy. Certainly, from where he had stood, the figure looked amazingly like Tommy's.

"Is it possible . . . ? Is it possible that Muriel has also . . . ?" He said these words in a whisper, but did not finish his sentence.

"How can that be . . ." he went on musing, as he resumed walking. "Tommy is not the sort that would . . ."

He turned into a side street, which was comparatively deserted, and was soon accosted by a girl. He looked

at her. She had a good, if not a pretty face, not so hard as the faces he had seen that evening; evidently she had not been long in the "business."

"Are you lonely, boy?" she said in a cordial, "sporty" tone. "Come with me. I'll show you a good time. 'Pon my word, I will," she urged him, as she saw him hesitate.

Without further ceremony, she put her arm through his, and led him gently along.

"How you do tremble!" she said suddenly. "Ain't you been to a woman before?"

"Yes, I have!" he lied to her.

"Well, you ain't been often," she persisted, to the hurt of his pride.

She paused before a small house, which showed a dim light on the ground floor, and looking around to see that no policeman was in sight, quickly unlocked the door.

"Come in, boy, quick!"

She conducted him upstairs, into a small bedroom, and lit the gas-jet. She took off her hat, and kissed his lips; then quickly she threw off her loose upper garment and, in the twinkling of an eye, was in bed. She watched him taking his coat off.

Suddenly a woman's voice came up the stairs:

"Are you there, Muriel?"

"What did she call you?" asked Gombarov, not quite sure that he heard aright.

"Muriel. A nice name, don't you think?"

His coat in his hand, he blushed violently, and didn't know what to say. After some hesitation, he began to draw on his coat again. He pulled a dollar-bill from his pocket.

"If you don't mind," he said, handing her the money, "I won't stop with you to-night. I'm not feeling quite well."

She, in bed, went off into paroxysms of laughter.

"Well, it's the funniest thing that's ever happened to me. It's the second time to-night. There's been a boy here no more than a half-hour ago . . . and no sooner he heard my name than off he scooted. I thought there was a bug in his head. And now you're repeating the show. . . . Well, I never . . ."

He waited to hear no more. As she let him out, she pushed a card into his hand:

"That's the address, boy. Come when you feel more like it. I like you. . . ."

"What an extraordinary night!" said Gombarov to himself. "That last thing was like the finger of God!"

The strangeness of it made him forget his sorrow.

XII

He met Muriel—not the Muriel of his late adventure—a fortnight later, by chance. It was in the gallery foyer of the Academy of Music, in the interval of the orchestra concert.

She walked up to him, with a submissive air, smiling. "You haven't looked me up for a long time," she said reproachfully, her face close to his, her body sidling.

"What are you doing to-morrow night?" he asked with a nonchalant air.

"Let me see," she said, twirling round on one foot.

He intuitively felt that she would break any other engagement to meet him; nevertheless, he waited for her answer.

"Nothing . . ." she said at last. "Why?"

"If to-morrow evening is clear," said Gombarov, "I should like you to go out in the country. You know that spot where you and I once went for a walk, just a mile out of Darby?"

"What, alone?" asked Muriel, scenting something.

"Yes, alone. When you are there, I want you to look up at the sky, and at the stars . . . count them . . . as many stars as there are up there, so many times the devil take you!"

"Do you mean it?" asked Muriel, in a low voice.

"Yes, I mean it. Good-bye."

The orchestra by this time had struck up the "Eroica"; Gombarov and Muriel went in opposite directions to their seats.

Henceforth, Muriel in his mind became the "Lady of the Stars."

CHAPTER IX

I

THE Russians, no doubt a barbarous people, have yet evolved two sayings worth recording here:

"When there is no fish, then the crab is a fish."

"When there is no *vodka*, let's talk about *vodka*."

So it was with Gombarov. The banal world, in which he lived, had nothing heroic in it; and he could hardly be blamed if, taking into account the relativity of things, he should regard his last colloquy with Muriel, or rather, the making up of his mind which led to it, as a piece of heroism. He *had* to think it that, just as in the absence of *vodka* the Russian peasant was under the supreme necessity of talking about it. Which only shows that the passion of the not-having is far more intense than the passion of actual possession, if affording less satisfaction. The benefits of wealth are appreciated only by the poor; the advantages of poverty are constantly harped on by the rich.

He did not love her less when he thus spoke to her; nor did he altogether think that his last chance of winning her was gone; but his pride had at last revolted; he was one of those beings, not at all uncommon, who for a time allow themselves to be led by the nose, until suddenly the thought strikes them that, of all the functions a nose is called upon to exercise, that of having it pinched between a thumb and a forefinger, not his own, if pretty ones, is the most humiliating. Not that he had not seen some young men led to the altar in that manner. Tommy himself, now that Gombarov eliminated himself from the undignified rivalry, was on his way to the marriage-bed, conducted in this unseemly, unmanly fashion. Tommy's weakness was his strength. After all, why not? There would be other functions for the nose after marriage; keeping it to the grindstone, to mention one. This particular pleasure Gombarov enjoyed without marrying; like many young men of our time, he had his dependent little ones ready-made for him. To all these thoughts of Gombarov, whenever he

ventured to express them, there was always one and the same comment: "So young and so bitter. You ought to be glad you haven't any little ones of your own!" On one occasion Gombarov retorted: "Do you love your wife? Do you love your little ones? Did you take any pleasure in their begetting?" But such an answer only intensified their opinion of his presumed cynicism. Or, if it was a young bachelor to whom he expressed his ideas on life, the comment would be something of this nature: "Take life cheerfully, my boy. Look at me. I live on this principle: 'What's the use of buying a cow when you can get your milk for nothing?'" Gombarov noted that this cheerful young man was not thought cynical and was extremely popular with the most puritanic virgins.

Having, by his decision, driven his idol from the pedestal, Gombarov found himself with an empty pedestal on his hands; and, having in mind the metaphysics of love, by the laws of which an empty pedestal weighs infinitely more than a pedestal supporting some fair one worth her weight in gold; moreover, still possessed by the idea, which some would call an *idée fixe*, that love was the law of life; he instinctively began to scan the horizon for someone to grace the pedestal, now as empty as his heart and all his world; and in the course of the quest he found himself becoming a philanderer, as bad as Marianne with her "one night stands." Strange to say, he found that "philandering," that civilised custom consistent with the principle of the "exchange counter" in department stores and the principle of "try them before you buy them," attracted girls, if of impermanent attraction. Nevertheless, one serious claimant to Muriel's pedestal presented herself.

II

She was a little thing, a Jewess, a musician, hardly more than seventeen. She had a huge head of hard, wavy, wild black hair, from the middle of which her small rose-cheeked face peeped out, as it were a heart's flower, with two luminous brown stains, from among its voluminous, wide-stretching petals. She was a young, wild poppy, the gipsy among flowers; natural and voluptuous, touched with none of the subtle nuances and

cultivated appeal of the slender iris. Her skirts did not conceal the taut, strong lines of her body; her teeth were strong, even and white; the two points of her firm small breasts made themselves faintly palpable from under her jersey: "twin Fuji-Yamas"—to use a phrase of Bayliss's—of her sacred, clean sensuality. Her name was Judith.

He well remembered the evening in the spring that he took her out walking in Fairmount Park. They were leaning on a rail along the banks of the Schuylkill. The night was quiet and warm; the full moon gave a silver sheen to the waters, which reflected the graceful tracery of blossoming trees, as yet unadorned with the long, full skirts of the matronly summer; the faint aroma of flowers drifted across from the neighbouring beds and distilled itself through the arteries of man and girl into a delicious essence of sensuality. In short, Nature's stage was set in her ablest manner for the play of love.

For some time they leant silently, looking across towards the opposite bank, where a passenger train, spotted with lights, a luminous dragon belching fire from its mouth, was slowly winding its way round a curve, and finally disappeared into a cave—or was it a tunnel?—leaving suspended behind a sediment of its breath, incongruously black and foul in the witching light.

Then his arm gently stole round her. She not only raised no protest, but drew it around her tighter, and, leaning on his shoulder, took his hand; whereupon he drew her still closer to him, and lifting her head, softly joined his lips to hers. Her own contact, gentle at first, developed an astonishing fierceness; she clove to him as if she would drink him in, while he felt against him the almost violent virginal tremors of her body. He, at last, gently released her from him, only to hear her gasp: "I love you, I love you, I love you." Her manner terrified him: hers was a flame sufficient to consume them both. He also knew, felt with a sure instinct, that he had but to say a word and she would give herself to him wholly and unreservedly; that a word from him would release all the wild music of her soul, which would sing for him, and for him alone; he also unmistakably knew that she was waiting for the word, passionately waiting for it, in order that all the strings of her might play for him; but the intensely desired word did not come from him; his own misgivings played a discordant tune in his ears.

III

Had he but met her three or four years before, when he had not yet met those others, had not been touched by their richly nuanced markings so unlike the single-purposeness of the poppy, had not heard their many-tuned Siren song; had not been poisoned by and with them, had not been inured by them as to some fatal drug now become a need—not to be purged out of one's system; then all might have been well, and he would have taken the wild poppy and rejoiced in her; that was the irony of life—she had come too late! He now too clearly realised that in his contact with the new world, so far removed from the world still held firm by the roots of the Russian woods, he had become half like the new world, and to some degree at least its needs had become his needs. Alluring as was that wild song, and clear as was its appeal to what was primitive in his soul, calculated, no doubt, to satisfy him for a time, there were new, more cultured, more sophisticated, if you like, perceptions added on to his personality; he was, indeed, on his way to become as inconsequent as Marianne. She, a Puritan, with aspirations towards the primitive, had earnestly sought for a moral Napoleon; he, a primitive, with aspirations to modernity, was seeking for a *poppy-iris:* a primitive woman with all the seductive graces of a Parisian courtesan!

Was there to be found such an antinomian flower, a red poppy with all the subtle nuance of the iris? This paradox, at least, explained to him the otherwise curiously unaccountable polygamous tendency in modern society, especially evident in men of genius, who indulged in several mistresses, each evoking a response in some one chord of the several vibrating in their being. Yet with all his credulous heart he believed that somewhere in this world there were wonderful women capable of awaking and responding to all the chords which vibrate in the soul of the modern complex man.

And having, through a most subtle concatenation of reason, arrived at these simple conclusions, he could not see himself plucking the poppy; civilisation had not yet sufficiently debased and barbarised him for him to be able to pluck and to throw away. As it was, he again

and again questioned himself: was his character disintegrating under its corrosive action? In many respects he noted a growing callousness to many things; a laxity which earlier would have been unthought of; but his conscience and pity remained with him. He did not know whether to regard the latter fact with satisfaction; for, by now, he saw too clearly that nothing more than these stood in the way of one's "progress." More than himself, his childlike brothers and sisters were an evidence of that, for they could not cope with the world. Civilisation appeared to him to be inverted barbarism.

IV

His final decision with regard to his poppy came in a curious way, by means of an incident in itself petty.

The musical critic of the *New World* had presented him with tickets for the orchestra concert, and his first thought was to take the poppy to it; nevertheless, he wavered, could not make up his mind. At last he boarded a trolley going in the direction of her house. He had not gone more than a few yards when an Italian girl came in and sat down opposite him.

She was extraordinarily beautiful, rather pale, her face a well-defined oval, with broad, perfectly arched eyebrows curving down inwardly and merging with the lines of the ridge of her straight nose; the lips were red and full, yet reticent; and her eyes were large, soft and luminous; her hair, what was visible of it under her hat, was a jet-black and circled her head in thick braids. Altogether, she looked the sensual, the refined pagan Madonna, such as was painted by Botticelli and other Italian masters. He was fascinated. He could not keep his eyes from her, yet it hurt him to look at her. She imparted a joy and a sadness, such as all great beauty imparts.

"Great God!" he suddenly thought. "What can I be thinking of? Here is a face I have never seen before, and am never likely to see again. Yet I am in love with it, could be in love with it for ever. How can I be thinking of going to Judith?"

He made up his mind with a quickness unusual to him. The girl got off at the next stop, he at the following.

"It's too ridiculous to think of my going to her," he

said to himself, and turned his footsteps homeward. He went to the concert alone that evening.

V

The petty episode of the Italian girl had decided him to give up his quest of temporal things; to consecrate his ungratified senses, as far as his material responsibilities at home would allow, to devotion to the Muse. He had not yet learnt how infinitely more exacting She was than the most capricious woman. But to one thing he had made up his mind about her: she was faithful, once you had won her.

Just as he was tuning up, as it were, for his life of an artistic monk, the unexpected happened. It always does.

CHAPTER X

I

IN the City of Brotherly Love, as elsewhere, a Private View of Pictures usually implied a Public View of Bare Backs. No doubt, to the unaccustomed stranger, unable to see the pictures for that steady procession of white skin and fine plumes, it must have seemed as if the town's whole bareback population, commonly known as Society, had turned out to have their backs judged and awards conferred. There were masterpieces of unequal merit and some indifferent daubs on view—backs, be it remembered, not pictures, are under discussion. If the truth be told, Nature, presuming to do homage to Art, had stolen a march on Art; had, in these bare backs, eclipsed Art as the Supreme Realist; had shown the folly of imitation.

"One of the finest collections I have seen," whispered Bayliss in Gombarov's ear. "No, no, I'm not referring to the pictures," he added, seeing his friend's quizzical look.

Old ladies with lorgnettes of turquoise and gold, middle-

aged dowagers, young bepowdered matrons, chaperons in charge of débutantes, proud art patronesses, petticoated connoisseurs and *dilettanti*, erudite members of numerous Browning societies and literary clubs: in short, the whole vast army of women with time hanging on their hands and affecting the encouragement of the arts, swept by in review, chattering away inanely on this or that inane picture, pausing longer before a portrait of their friend, Mrs Flapdoodle, or their enemy, Mrs Blackpox.

"Yes, my dear, they say he married her for her money . . ."

"There couldn't have been any other reason, could there?"

"I wonder how she got Sargent to paint her. They say he won't paint *any*body!"

"Perhaps she paid double, my dear!"—a compliment for Sargent.

"Whatever she's paid, she got her money's worth. My dear, he hasn't overlooked a freckle!"

"And with what marvellous detail he has painted the small wart between her eyebrows!"

"My dear, I wouldn't call it exactly small . . ."

"Oh, how d'you do, Mrs Blackpox?"—this to a pretty, well-dressed woman, who had just come up—"we were just admiring your portrait. Mr Sargent must have surely been interested in you to have painted you so well!"

And so on and so on. All of which was necessary for the encouragement of modern art.

Mingling with this stream of the *élite* were artists and art students of both sexes and their friends, art critics and highbrow journalists, the *nouveaux riches*, and aspirants for the ranks of the exclusive Four Hundred. Here and there, some sycophantic young portrait painter, in evening dress, well aware on which side his bread was buttered, and anxious to pick up the crumbs dropped by Sargent, waited attendance on some beaming, purring art patroness, who would introduce him to her friends with the remark:

"You really must get your portrait painted by Mr Dauber. If he keeps on, he will be another Sargent. . . . And, by the way, I'm at home next Wednesday. Do come down. I have the dearest new little French poodle to show you. Oh, Mr Dauber, you must put him into the picture when you paint my daughter . . ."

"Delighted, I'm sure, Mrs Fatpurse," Mr Dauber would reply, bowing awkwardly. What with the cultivated disorder of his hair, his pointed young beard, and his swallow-tail, his action resembled that of a goat about to butt.

It would take a Daumier, a Rowlandson or a Gavarni to do justice to the scene. And Bayliss's remark to Gombarov would do as well as any other for the title of the picture: "Of such is the kingdom of modern art."

"I'm afraid I must get out of this room," said Gombarov suddenly. "Muriel and Tommy are here, and I want to avoid them."

They went into the next room.

"I'm afraid I must get out of here too!" laughed Gombarov. "Marianne and her husband are here. I don't like him. Besides, she's sure to ask me how my affair with Muriel is getting on."

"Your sins will find you out," laughed Bayliss, following his friend into the next room. "That's what comes of being Don Juan. Oh, there's Miss Gwynne and her mother. They've heard of you, and they've asked me once or twice to bring you to see them. Wait till you hear Miss Gwynne's voice. I'm afraid you'll fall in love with her." And he conducted Gombarov toward the Gwynnes.

II

"I think you are Mr Gombarov," said Mrs Gwynne, before Bayliss had had time to mention his name.

"How did you know?" laughed Gombarov, rather flattered.

"Well, you see," said Mrs Gwynne, smiling, "I've read your wonderful articles on art, and seeing you with Mr Bayliss, I at once assumed it was you. I said to myself that only someone with a face like that could have written them . . ."

They all laughed heartily.

"And this," said Mrs Gwynne, "is my daughter Winifred."

He and Miss Gwynne shook hands. Miss Gwynne looked at him curiously and steadily, so that once or twice when he looked up, he had to avert his gaze.

Mother and daughter resembled each other only in the

erectness and slenderness of their tall figures Where there was no mistaking the middle-aged woman with her prematurely grey hair and sharp features like an American Indian's, and the somewhat shrill accent known in Paris as *très Americaine*, there was an attractive, almost inexplicable foreignness about the daughter that invariably made people look up, interested, the moment she made her appearance. It was not that she dressed with a fascinating quaintness after designs devised by herself (which Gombarov learnt later); she had come to that idea, after all, only because she was not the sort of picture that any standard frame might fit; but her whole person exhaled and radiated an exoticism and a remoteness, strangely out of harmony with the artificiality and tinsel-like shallowness of the women who formed the moving background, as it were, to accentuate her virtues. Even her mother, youthful as she seemed in spite of her grey hair and matronly dignity, formed a contrast to her, had more kinship to the background than to the dominating figure in the picture; was there, if you like, to " set her off."

She had a small, finely featured head poised on a long shapely neck; her smooth jet-black hair, with its rich coppery sheen, was decoratively arranged in rosettes over the ears, without hiding the beautiful shape of the head; the whole profile was a masterpiece of delicacy and, in a curious way, resembled the famous Da Vinci portrait of Beatrice d'Este, at Milan. From the front view, the features were somewhat broader, the outer lines curving in slightly and attractively under the high cheek-bones. The skin tints were unusual: a kind of faint almond-brown, flushed with red. Her dark-brown eyes had a haunted look in them, as if frightened of life. As for her voice, Bayliss was quite right: it was resonant and sweet, like an old violoncello's. With this all, there was something childlike about her; and as the elfin, so the childlike in women always appealed to Gombarov; in Miss Gwynne it was all the more attractive because it had the mellowness of the childlikeness of an old, not a young race; in which she presented another marked contrast to her mother. There was but one thing that Gombarov noted with a feeling of dissatisfaction, which he tried to brush aside, and that was that in shaking hands, she put out her small one quite rigidly, without unbending it even slightly in the clasp.

As the party strolled through the galleries they discussed art and the usual trivialities which people indulge in at a first meeting. When, a quarter of an hour later, they parted, he again remarked the rigid handshake, the effect of which was dissipated by the warmth of their invitation to their house.

"We shall expect you Saturday evening," was Mrs Gwynne's parting injunction, while her daughter looked at him with that strange intent look of hers, which he could not forget.

III

The Gwynnes, mother and daughter, occupied a small two-room flat, with an outlook on an old public square. Like the Kents, the Gwynnes were considered among "the best families in Philadelphia." Like the Kents, they belonged to the genteel poor. Mrs Gwynne earned a living by journalism, and was supporting her daughter through Art School. The flat, partly furnished with Colonial pieces, family heirlooms, was enlivened by many bits of coloured drapery such as one finds in an artist's studio, and usually employed in backgrounds. Miss Gwynne, who opened the door to Gombarov, was herself a fascinating arrangement of contrasting colours; it would not have become one girl in ten thousand, but became her perfectly.

"So glad you've come," she said simply, in that deep musical voice of hers, which imparted to her most commonplace speech a significance usually ascribed to, but not often possessed by, an operatic passage. "Mother is in the back room," she added, "finishing a new dress. She'll be out presently."

Mrs Gwynne's voice came in rather realistically after that, though none the less welcoming. Mrs Gwynne talked volubly and eagerly; her daughter simply and briefly. Gombarov was rather pleased at the elder woman's show of confidence, which encouraged his own. They were both—Mrs Gwynne and Gombarov—anxious to demonstrate, without showing their hand, what nice people they were. Miss Gwynne's too rare remarks made rich spots in the conversation design; while her eyes spoke a language of their own; it was as if the very silence of the lips had fostered a speaking tendency in the eyes; as in those veiled Eastern women, whose physical virtues,

concealed by custom, find an intensified outlet in the eyes, peeping quaintly and passionately across the veil. There was also something infinitely pathetic in that suggestion of fear and dumb appeal. Gombarov sometimes found this look in his own eyes when he looked into the mirror.

In the course of the evening, a woman they all knew came under discussion; and Mrs Gwynne made a disparaging remark about her.

"Mother, you're a cat!" suddenly exclaimed Winifred, whereupon they all laughed.

"That's not a very nice thing to say," said Mrs Gwynne reprovingly.

"I don't care. You are a big grey cat," she reiterated, with a laugh.

The incident greatly astonished Gombarov, who had not yet met a woman who did not regard another woman as legitimate prey for disparagement. And it increased his estimation of Miss Gwynne.

"You mustn't mind the child," went on the mother, as if apologising for her daughter's rudeness. "She comes out with a quaint remark now and then."

After they had had coffee the mother retired to the back room to finish her dress, and Gombarov and Miss Gwynne were left to themselves. They discussed art, poetry, the people they knew, and all the customary things. Gombarov talked in his usual way, with eyes sometimes in the distance; but now and then, contracting his gaze, he found Miss Gwynne's eyes looking at him with that strange intentness which first attracted his attention; and from that look, everything that was said by either, even the most irrelevant thing, assumed a significance and an intimacy which were not in the words themselves. It was pleasant to sit there, in that comfortable and harmonious room, and to talk and to listen, and to grasp at hidden meanings in the mere sound of otherwise meaningless words. The evening came too soon to an end.

IV

For a whole fortnight Gombarov did not see the Gwynnes, though an irresistible impulse sent him more than once strolling in the direction of the square in which they lived. He walked up and down the paths of the

square, his eyes fixed on one doorway, in the hope that he might see them come out, and meet them, as it were, casually. One evening, about half-past eight, just as he was leaving the square, he ran straight into them. They were returning home. They saw each other at the same instant; they all beamed a greeting together.

"Were you going anywhere?" asked Mrs Gwynne.

"No; I was just strolling," replied Gombarov in a casual way, trying to control his gladness.

"What do you say to coming in and having coffee with us?" said Mrs Gwynne.

"Yes, do," said Winifred.

"I shall be delighted. I won't be interfering with any work?" asked Gombarov, half-hesitating.

"Oh, no; after coffee I shall go in and work; and you two can sit and go on talking."

On the second evening with the Gwynnes the conversation took on a somewhat more intimate turn; there was an interchange of personal experiences and family histories. But, as before, the only impression that remained with Gombarov was the interpenetration of eyes and the inexplicable seductiveness of the sound of words.

V

He ventured to call a third time, a week later, though not without scruples. He wondered: would her mother call a halt on too frequent visits? Would she, suspecting an infatuation, ruthlessly cut the as yet thin silken thread of melody which, slowly unravelling, was beginning to sing gently but none the less audibly somewhere deep within him, having entered there and ingratiated itself through the senses of seeing and hearing and a third sense not accounted legitimate among the senses—that sense which, perhaps more than any other, leads to a condition that sensible and respectable people call being "out of one's senses"? He himself could supply reasons for any action she might take. To be a Jew! To be a Russian Jew! To be a moneyless Jew! Here was one, or, if you like, three good enough reasons: there was no need of going into others; especially since Winifred was Mrs Gwynne's only child, a legitimate Daughter of the American Revolution! There was, to be sure, one compensating advantage: there were no brothers and

sisters to meddle in any intimate relationship which their acquaintance might lead to; and the Gwynnes appeared to be quite independent of their relatives. Even without having regard to future relations, the present one was very pleasant; the Gwynne flat was an oasis where his weary, ravaged soul might rest.

Again he had occasion to reflect: what a terrible, incomprehensibly terrible thing was a loveless life! But the seeking for love: that eternal quest for someone, or for something, to give a meaning and a justification to life, to give a fulness and a sense of abundance to life, to create grounds for belief in a God, in gods, or in mystic forces directing human destiny, without which life appeared as empty as an egg-shell whose contents had been sucked out: was not this equally terrible, equally incomprehensible? And could that be called love, when one had to lie, to pretend, to act the hypocrite, in order to reach one's noble goal, that which was called love? Then, again, there was always the inevitable question of money, without which, in spite of all sentimental romantics, no love, even if reached, could endure. Love may be blind; but blindness need not blunt the money sense; may be acutely aware of the feel of money.

Thought of all this made him pause, made him doubt his ability to achieve the desired end, or even the advisability of achieving it. Nevertheless, he determined to see the thing through. An ounce of emotion is more potent than a ton of reason, and a reckless courage is born of having one's back against the wall. This decision satisfied, at all events, his aspiration for the heroic. Not that he was unaware that there were human beings who would regard his decision as simply ridiculous. Well, it *was* ridiculous! He would have been the first person to grant you that. But it took courage to be ridiculous! It was better to be a hero of a tragi-comedy than no hero at all. When it came to that, he reflected, most men were ridiculous, and all life was more or less a tragi-comedy. One aspired towards money, another towards love. Well, there was one John Moneypot, who had more money than he could spend if he lived to be as old as Methuselah; this John Moneypot believed in Christ; Christ said something about a camel going through the eye of a needle and a rich man going to heaven: the inference was plain: the more money you had to burn, the more hell-fuel you were stacking up for

yourself! Was not this, too, stuff for a tragi-comedy? Nevertheless, reasonable men thought John Moneypot a sensible fellow; while John Gombarov, who was really not worth thinking about, they would have thought a fool and a good-for-nothing, in which he would have quite agreed with them. He knew the ideas of most men he had come in contact with:

"Get yourself a little pile, my boy. Then the skirts and peek-a-boos will come smelling 'round like flies round a honey-pot!"

They were brothers to that other crew he knew so well, who had like ideas on literature:

"Write a best-seller first, my boy. Then you can afford to go in for high-brow stuff!"

But Gombarov had not yet rid himself of the preposterous idea that the love that was bought was not worth buying, and that if one could deliberately write a book for money one could not possibly write another kind.

VI

"There are ridiculously petty actions in life which require no little moral courage in carrying out," reflected Gombarov, on his way for the third time to the Gwynne flat. "I feel as Oliver Twist must have felt when he had made up his mind to ask for more gruel. The heroism on the part of Oliver was never fully recognised, because it seemed such a petty action. Yet surely the same desperate impulse translated on the battle-field would have won him a Victoria Cross. If what I propose doing to-night fails, then the game is up for ever, and the doors of the house may be shut to me. Shall I risk that? 'Faint heart never won fair lady.' 'Nothing venture, nothing gain.' 'Only the brave deserve the fair.' 'He who hesitates is lost.' On the other hand: 'Look before you leap.' 'All things come to him who waits.' 'More haste, less speed.' 'A fool and his girl are soon parted,' etc., etc. Authorities are divided. I must do the strong, the positive thing."

Could one have overheard Gombarov's thoughts, one would hardly have gathered that all he meant to do was to ask Miss Gwynne out for a walk. And he meant to do it in her mother's presence. One who knew

Philadelphia ways, and the ways of a blue-blooded mother with an only daughter, who was pretty, accomplished, and "a mere child," so to speak, having only just passed her eighteenth birthday, would have judged the proposed action on the part of a penniless Russian Jew, who was ten years the girl's senior, audacious in the extreme; if less polite, he would have referred to it as "a piece of colossal cheek," a specimen of impudence and arrogance such as only a Jew was capable of! But the possession of "cheek" implies a constant, unconscious and unhesitating arrogance, never doubting itself; while Gombarov arrived at his decision only after a mental crisis of greater significance than would appear on first consideration.

"I am sick to death of wavering, hesitating, being cautious. I must try to overcome myself, whatever its cost. There are things that go against my grain. But that's precisely why I must do them. . . ."

One will gather from this reflection what a momentous decision it was, that its implication was not a surface one, meant something more to him than the mere act of taking a nice young girl out for a walk. Like his other suppressed instincts, his aspiration for the heroic, finding no outlet, worked inwardly, and going too deep for a frank Vesuvian eruption, succeeded merely in causing little flurries, throwing up petty mole-hills on the surface.

It was, therefore, with something of the sense of having "girded up his loins" that he approached the door of the Gwynne flat and rang the bell.

Mrs Gwynne opened the door to him, and welcomed him in. "Sit down. The child is in the next room. She'll be in in a moment."

"Thanks, but I've only stopped in for a moment to see if your daughter would go out for a walk." And Gombarov's heart thumped. At the same instant Winifred came in.

"Mr Gombarov has come to take you out for a walk," said Mrs Gwynne.

"It's awfully nice of you," said Winifred. "I should like to very much, but . . ."

"That's all right," said Mrs Gwynne, interrupting her. "I'll do the washing-up. A walk will do you good."

"Perhaps you'd like to join us?" said Gombarov, for politeness' sake.

"Oh, no; I've got an article to finish to-night. But perhaps after your walk you'll come back and have coffee."

Gombarov felt greatly relieved, and not a little astonished.

VII

After a short walk they sat down on a bench in the square.

"You look troubled," said Gombarov.

"I'm worried about mother. She's so good to me. She works for us both. And I wish I could do my share in making money."

"Wait till you grow up," said Gombarov, with a smile. "You'll get your chance."

"I like that! And you yourself told us the other evening that you had begun supporting your family from the time you were ten!"

"Eleven."

"Eleven, then. I think it's too dreadful! And you are supporting them still! And Bayliss told us about that brother of yours, how you had put him through Art School, and how it was all wasted. You must have lots of courage to have done all that. To have educated yourself, too! You must have a big brain."

"There was no help for it. It had to be done. But let's talk not about me, but about you."

"I'm quite commonplace. Mother is giving me all the things she had missed herself. She wanted very much to go to Art School when she was a girl."

"And your father . . . ?"

"Father's a wicked man. He left us. He ran after other women." There was a tremor in her voice, as she added: "He doesn't even ever ask about me."

"I'm sorry to have brought up any sad memories."

"You are the only person I've ever told this to. I feel that you understand these things."

He looked at her sympathetically.

"Our family is a queer lot," she went on, as if she wished to further demonstrate her trust in him. "There was Uncle Matthew, who died lately. He was a rich man. He pretended to like us, and everyone expected that he would remember us. He not only left us not a cent, but he cursed mother on his deathbed."

"Your family appears to be quite as strange as mine. You, too, are strange. Perhaps that's why I am drawn to you. I like coming to your little flat. It's such a relief after my own house."

"Come as often as you like," she returned frankly. "Our visitors are quite few. There are so few people one really likes. You know," she added, with a laugh, "my mother dislikes men."

"Really? In that case, I wonder why she let me take you for a walk. To tell you the truth, I hesitated to ask you."

"Oh, she's quite fond of *you*! She doesn't think you like other men."

"And you?"

"I think you are strange and different. You seem extraordinarily foreign. I said to mother the first time I saw you: 'He looks like an ancient Egyptian in modern clothes.'"

"That's strange," said Gombarov. "For when I first saw you, I said to myself that you looked rather like Da Vinci's portrait of Beatrice d'Este, a reproduction of which I have at home."

"And yet," she observed, "I have a drop of American Indian blood in me."

"I'm afraid it's getting too cold for you here," he remarked, as he observed a shiver pass down her beautiful neck.

"Yes, let's go back to the house," said Winifred, as he helped her to arrange her wrap round her shoulders and neck.

VIII

He became a regular visitor at the house, and they grew accustomed to expecting him. Often they had their meals together, at the house or at a restaurant. He gradually learnt something of their family history, an unusually interesting one; and revealed his. And when matters of importance needed thinking over, they consulted him, and he them. Their deference and kindness to him affected him strangely. He thought these original because he had not had them before from women. This attitude took him unawares, made him feel shy at times; Winifred, quick to discover his embarrassment, would exclaim:

"Look, mother, he's blushing!"

"How can that be?" he would expostulate. "My skin is brown. Even if I blushed, you couldn't possibly see it."

"I can tell by your eyes when you are blushing." Mrs Gwynne would come in with her share of teasing.

This, too, was pleasant to him, since we do not tease those for whom we do not entertain some affection.

After his long storm-tossed existence, there came upon his spirit a sunlit calm, incredible as a dream. And as the weeks went on, he was gratified to note that that strange look of fear in Winifred's eyes appeared less frequently than before. He felt that there was a soothing in each for the other.

IX

The first month it was Miss Gwynne; the second, Winifred; the third, Winnie.

It was midsummer now, and on his day off they would go for an outing to the country. On these occasions the strange exotic beauty of her head and face was even more strikingly set off by her white dress; her tall slender figure, as it were, the gracefullest of stems supporting a black-petalled flower with a heart of rose, flushing.

He was intensely proud to be seen walking beside this girl; and doubtless they must have seemed a strange pair to persons in the street: they were fully conscious of being observed by curious eyes. Gombarov would say teasingly:

"They're looking at you, Winnie!"

"No, no," she would retort; "it's you they are looking at. You look so distinguished."

"That's impossible. You are the handsome member of the party, and if they look at me at all, it's to say: 'Well, I never . . . look what she's picked up with!'"

"You are fishing, John!" she would reply with mock reproach, and they would start laughing like two irrepressible children.

Once in the country, they would climb rail fences, cross meadows, and sit down in some sequestered spot, usually near a cornfield; they liked to watch its broad, wavering undulations in the breeze as it caught the active glint of the sun, the whole producing an effect richly

rhythmic in sound and movement, and infecting the human soul with its own pulsations, as it were, of sheer living, free of all troubling cares and doubts.

"When I sit here in the sun," once observed Gombarov, "and watch the corn, I seem to return to what I once was, a boy in the Russian woods. Everything that I am in the city seems to recede from me, and I can see no object in all this mad striving, this fierce effort to get on and to do things; even artistic fame seems, in the final analysis, to be purposeless. Once I am back in civilisation, so to speak, I am carried along with the stream, am poisoned with the idea of progress, and I seem to do so many things that I don't want to do, and I do them precisely because I don't want to do them."

"I, too, was brought up in the country," said Winifred, "and I love the country. Only now, after town life, I feel that I can live in the country only in certain conditions."

"Yes," replied Gombarov, "I agree with you—only in certain conditions." He gave a significance to his voice which could hardly escape her.

She merely smiled, as he went on:

"Loneliness terrifies one, while people arouse one's contempt. I suppose one runs to company, even bad company, because in solitude one gets to have such a wholesome contempt for oneself, whereas it is a more satisfactory feeling to have it for others."

"You think too much," said Winifred. "Come; read me something from Swinburne."

He picked up the book he brought with him, and read something from "Atalanta in Calydon."

"I am afraid Swinburne is not any more cheerful than I am," he said, putting the book down. "Come; let's have a sandwich and a tomato. I'm getting hungry."

She undid the parcel she had brought with her, and they set ravenously to munching sandwiches. How good it was just to live!

X

It was another day. Twilight was falling. Gombarov and Winifred were sitting on a bench in Fairmount Park. Alongside was a huge rock, and far below was the Wissahickon, barely audibly flowing, owing to the long summer drought. Gombarov, his elbows on his knees,

sat with his head buried in his hands. He had had a fine day, but there was something on his mind. She sat near, and looked at him with that frightened look of hers.

"I simply don't know what to do," he said finally. "I don't know whether I ought to go away—to New York or to London. You see, I find myself caring for you more and more. If I only knew that you cared for me enough to wait for me, it would give me courage to endure everything. . . ."

"I was never so fond of anyone. Your going away would be dreadful," said Winifred, putting a hand on his shoulder. "Mother and you are the only people I care for in this world. But, you see, my dear, you've got to help your family, and I've got to help mother. . . ."

"You see, Winnie, I am living in constant fear of having you snatched from me. . . ."

"But I don't know anyone . . ."

"No, not now . . . but to-morrow . . . the day after to-morrow . . . I have my reasons . . ."

"I care for you. . . . I would not know what to do if you went. . . . We've been such good pals . . ."

"But promise . . . I trust your word. Promise . . . if you love. . . . But wait. First, I must tell you something about myself. You'll then understand why I ask. . . ."

And he proceeded to tell his heart's history, dwelling largely upon his unfortunate affair with Muriel.

"Now I've told you everything," he concluded. "I don't want to hide anything from you. I had made up my mind not to love again . . . when you came. . . . The last few weeks have seemed like a dream after a nightmare. Now a word from you will make me forget everything but my love for you. . . . And really, I feel as if I never loved before. . . ."

She said nothing, but let her head droop on his shoulder. She clung very closely to him: her body seemed to shrink, to want to lose itself in him, to merge with his. He lifted up her small head, found her lips and that they loved him. The pins began dropping out of her hair, which loosened; he draped his head with it, wound it round his neck, deliciously lost himself as in some imagined world of incredible loveliness; brought, as it were, into being out of the fumes of incense, rising into the air from the censer of a love-possessed genie and

overcoming a welcome intruder by an overpowering aromatic essence, which was neither of myrrh, nor violets, nor new-mown hay, but a subtle commingling of all these, inducing visions of some dimly remembered Eden. He heard a sound, a music—whence came it?—and a faint, and still a fainter, " I love you, I love you, I love you! " Then there was a long silence, and he felt her body leaning rather more heavily than before in the crook of his arm. Somewhat frightened, he disengaged himself from her hair, and looked at her. Her eyes were closed, and she was breathing heavily. He thought she had swooned.

" Winnie! " he called to her.

Slowly her eyes opened, as of one awakened, and looked into his. Then she closed them again and rested quietly on his shoulder. They sat like this for a long time, he now and then whispering an endearment. Then, quite suddenly, she sat up.

" I could kill her! " she exclaimed vehemently.

" Don't think of her, darling! We have each other. That's all that matters."

" I could, you know! I am jealous of her. To think that you loved her—like that! "

" I tell you, my dear . . ." he began, but was interrupted.

" She was fascinating, wasn't she? And I'm not."

" I tell you, my dear, that you've just shown me heaven. . . . Can I say more? "

" Are you happy? Really happy? " said she, growing quieter. " Oh, dear, what a mess I'm in! " and she began doing up her hair, while he, with the help of matches, was picking up the dropped hairpins. " Oh, how shall I tell mother? " she exclaimed, pausing with her hands in her hair. " I've never kept anything from her."

" Don't tell her anything," pleaded Gombarov. " Not just yet. A little later."

XI

" I couldn't hold out any longer. I've told mother everything," said Winifred to him about a month later; and as he left the house, Mrs Gwynne slipped a note into his hand. The note stated that she knew what had happened, that she was fond of him, and would he call

next day in the afternoon—when Winifred would be away at school—as she wanted to have a talk with him.

Mrs Gwynne received him with the usual welcome. "You know, I'm very fond of you," she began, after they had comfortably disposed themselves on the settee. She then proceeded to state the case as he had expected her to. Winifred was her only daughter, her only solace, the only object for which she went on living; were it not for Winifred she would have put a bullet into her head long ago; even with Winifred, there were moments when it was all she could do to prevent herself from jumping into the Delaware.

"But I have no intention of taking her from you," said Gombarov. "We can all be together."

She then proceeded with a history of her struggles: the struggle with her family as an unloved child, the struggle with her wayward husband, the struggle with hard and eccentric relatives, the struggle with the world in general, the struggle with the wolf ever at the door, the struggle to give her daughter an education, the struggle to keep up appearances, the struggle against the fates themselves: goodness knows how many struggles it can fall to the lot of a single individual, and that a poor woman, to contend with! Her eyes filled with tears as she recalled this and that, the good and the bad times she'd had, the joys of first love which resulted in marriage and the agony of last hate which ended in separation; and now she was experiencing all the anticipations and fears of a lone mother who had an only daughter. The tears, small and scant at first, grew large and plentiful, and at last developed into a flood, which she tried to stem with a small lace handkerchief. When Gombarov saw these tears he felt he was lost; he could no more put himself up against a woman's tears than against the tides of the sea. He took hold of her hand, then so arranged his shoulder that the next movement of her head would deposit it there; which was, in fact, what happened. He stroked her hair and kissed her forehead.

"Don't think I don't know," he said. "I've had a hard struggle myself; and am not out of the woods yet."

"That's what worries me. How will you be able to take care of Winnie, when you already have your hands full?"

"That ought to give you confidence. For if I've never shirked my responsibilities with my family, you

can surely depend upon me to do the right thing for Winifred." He said this with conviction, but there rose up before him a vision of that same old wall, and the same old handwriting on the wall, just one word: HOW?

"And you are a Jew!"

These words of Mrs Gwynne's gave him a start. It was as if some invisible hand had suddenly erased the word HOW and simultaneously, as it were, electrically, substituted the word JEW in large, flaming letters, burning the word into his brain.

"Yes, that's so! I almost forgot that," he said, his hand pausing as he stroked her head. "I think myself merely a man, a human being; until someone suddenly reminds me what I am. . . . But that, I'm afraid, can't be undone. It was clearly God's will to make me a Jew. . . . If you like," he added, "I'll make off somewhere, to New York or to London . . . give up Winifred . . ."

"No, no," she said hurriedly, as with decision she adjusted his head on her breast. "You misunderstand me. I didn't mean to hurt you. I have the greatest respect for fine Jews. What I wanted to say was that, as a Jew, your struggle is a more hard one. You are bound to admit, that. My relatives, too, may be unpleasant. But I don't want to stand in Winnie's way, if she loves you. I'm giving her all the freedom I've not had myself. . . . There . . . there . . ." and she softly stroked his head.

She bent over him and kissed his cheeks. He felt himself soothed after his ruffling, and he gratefully returned her kisses on her tear-stained cheeks. Somehow their lips met, and did not part quickly. There was only one pair of lips that he really liked; it was not these. He thought it might be rude to snatch his own away, and as there was no indication of weariness on Mrs Gwynne's part, he gave himself up to philosophical speculations.

"Would it be proper," he asked himself, "to take my lips away? It would undoubtedly be a courageous thing to do. On the other hand, it would be a still more courageous thing to hold them there . . . but if I am doing this for Winnie's sake—or rather, for my own—for her mother can take her from me . . . then undoubtedly it's a less courageous thing to do. . . . Then, again, if one really loves, one will undoubtedly do anything, suffer anything, for the sake of his love. . . . Besides,

Mrs Gwynne has been very kind to me, and now she feels maternally towards me. . . . She too wants a little affection. . . . And she's Winnie's mother . . . if it were not for her there would not be any Winnie . . . and she's giving Winnie to me. . . . I'm an ungrateful wretch. . . . I like her, too . . . still, I wish she'd kiss my forehead or my cheeks instead. . . . I suppose it's wrong of me, but I don't quite like this. . . . She's got her eyes closed, too, as if she were enjoying it. . . ." (He kept his own open, and watched her.) "Quite like a young girl. . . . After all, I ought to be glad she's fond of me. . . . Still, it's been a long time. . . . I wish she would . . ."

She did. Even while he was mentally expressing his wish, she opened her eyes, and looked at him. "You dear boy!" she said.

"You, too, are a dear person!" said he. He really liked her immensely—that is, all but her lip kiss. Now that was past, he thought no more about it.

Just then footfalls could be heard in the corridor. The door opened, and in stepped Winifred.

"Mother, I did not feel like working to-day. And I thought you might be here," said she, turning to Gombarov.

XII

Like many other men dominated by a cross-purpose, Gombarov had acquired that not uncommon faculty of doing one thing and thinking another, at one and the same instant. Thus, on the afternoon of the next day, while sub-editing an article dealing with some proposed improvements to God's own world—written, needless to say, by a White Ribboner—Gombarov profoundly cogitated over the problem of how to make the most of the world as it was. He found no fault with the world as God made it, nor with the abundance thereof. God was a Yea-Sayer: lavishly He had conferred gifts upon man. Ungrateful man, to scorn the gifts from One he pretended to worship and honour! What a world this would be, thought Gombarov, if it were run by cranks. One set of cranks wanted to do away with drink, another with tobacco, a third with dancing, a fourth with the arts, a fifth thought it wrong to co-habit with a woman, a sixth conceived the supreme goal of man in the eating

of mock steaks and walnut sausages. These were all men of will; and where there is a will, there is a way—*not* to have things. (What selfishness, thought Gombarov, was in this folk, who, in the satisfaction of their inverted passions, were leaving their children the questionable heritage of suppressed instincts!) But the will to have was, after all, a far harder thing to satisfy, since it implied a power over others as well as over oneself. At another time Gombarov would have simply blue-pencilled the article as far as it was safe, would have said to himself, "It's enough to drive one to drink!" and with childlike spite would have even gone out and had one. On this occasion, however, he was sub-editing the article automatically, and thinking of his own affairs, a process stimulated by his conversation with Mrs Gwynne the day before.

So far, in this affair with Winifred, he had been successful beyond his expectations. He had never been so near to happiness. He loved, and was loved in return. And her mother was not against him. Yet he had a disquieting feeling of a fatalistic nature. Some families are simply doomed to misfortune: he belonged to such a one. Could he by fierce striving appease the gods: win them over to clemency, to a reconsideration of his case in the Fate Chamber, leading to a commutation of the sentence, "Misery for Life," seemingly pronounced upon him at birth for the indiscretion of having opened his eyes under a constellation not quite approved of by astrologists?

Coming down to hard tacks, it was always a matter of money. That too figures in fatalism. One man simply feels money in his bones, knows that money is coming to him, and, to be sure, money comes; quite as often as not without lifting a finger. Another person makes all sorts of attempts to befriend money: but money can be as coquettish and as fickle as a woman who throws an air kiss at you, says "Tra-la-la!" and before you can say "How d'ye do!" you see a pretty ankle and the flounced tail of a skirt disappearing round the corner. Gombarov saw too clearly that women and money went together; at least, this was true of the world he knew: the world of the genteel poor. Nor was the fact astonishing in itself: the women of the genteel poor possessed highly refined tastes; far more than the *nouveaux riches* they wanted the best of everything, even when their tastes were simple;

nothing, as every woman knows, is so expensive as refined simplicity. He knew too well that the Gwynnes did not belong to that category who lived by bread alone: silks, bits of lace, perfumes and liqueurs and flowers were equally essential to their thoroughly civilised lives, and had to be regarded in the nature of necessities. "Until death us do part" was a very nice sentiment, agreed Mrs Gwynne, and sententiously added: "But one can't live on it!" The full significance of her observation did not escape him. What Mrs Gwynne meant was that if but a single thing of the many that make up a comfortable existence were missing, the equilibrium of the whole structure of life would be threatened.

Though Winifred loved him with undoubted passion, he felt in some undefinable way the presence in the background of this material factor represented in the person of her mother, who exerted a peculiarly potent influence over her. He did not know why he should be possessed by the fear that the menace to his happiness should come precisely from the pragmatic education to which Winifred, like all native daughters, had been subjected. This pragmatism was, in effect, an effort to justify material opportunism; to demonstrate that there was no one absolute truth, but a thousand petty truths, one as true as another, in spite of antinomies and contradictions, and to be judged only according to application and results. Benjamin Franklin, thought Gombarov, was the first Pragmatist. Honesty was extolled not as a noble thing in itself, regardless of results, but as "the best policy," that is to say, it was good because it paid. If the spirit of this philosophy pervaded the great community, Gombarov still wondered why it was that Mrs Gwynne, who was not immune from this outlook on life, should have so generously encouraged him in his wooing; for he had neither social standing nor money nor prospects: he was a Jew, a Russian Jew, a Russian moneyless Jew: in short, a good-for-nothing! It was all a mystery to him, and he had not yet got over his astonishment. This mystery added to his apprehension; he feared that one day he would wake up to find it had been all a dream. "Why? Why? Why?" he asked himself again and again, sitting at his desk at the *New World*, thinking over yesterday's interview.

Even while he was exploring every corner of his brain for a solution, the 'phone bell rang. It was a call from

Mrs Gwynne. Greetings over, the wires, in a nervous voice, communicated the question:

"Have I acted like a fool yesterday?"

"No, no!" he replied, taken aback. "Why should you think so? You were very kind to me."

"I thought you might think me a fool. . . . Come over, if you can spare a half-hour. Winifred is not in. We can have another quiet chat. . . ."

"All right; I'll be over there presently. Good-bye," and he hung up the receiver. For some moments he sat, looking perplexed. "What did she mean?" he asked himself. "No, no. That's impossible . . . impossible!" he said, almost aloud, as a new thought struck him. "Utterly impossible! . . ."

XIII

He could not adjust himself to adjustable truths. Not shifting truths he wanted, as unstable as sand castles by the sea; but some one eternal, one absolute truth, to which, on days of fierce high tides of the human spirit, one might cling as to a firm unshifting rock. "Until death us do part" was one such truth, it seemed to him. He longed for Winifred to come to him, and without stint or questioning to offer up everything to him, just as he had offered up everything to her. Not that he would have taken everything. Far from it. He would have given infinitely more than he would have taken. In this sense he was in harmony with his new environment, in which the chivalrous idea prevailed that you cannot do enough for a woman. Here, if you like, was one "eternal truth," in conflict with all experience, and therefore with the native philosophy of Pragmatism. But one must suffer for "eternal truth"; and dearly the native male paid for this one luxury, this one "eternal truth," which was not justified by "results." Gombarov, too, in his loyalty to this "truth," which by now had become second nature, deliberately refused to profit by past experience. With a childlike faith he said to himself: he would win his heart's desire by the greatness, the overwhelmingness of his love. Again and again Bayliss warned him: "Nothing is more fatal to the success of your love than to love more than you are loved." But Gombarov, confident that great love could win, scornful of policy,

unwilling if he could to sacrifice the principle for the sake of "results," took no heed of these warnings. He was greatly astonished one day when Winifred herself had remarked to him, when he was letting her have her own way:

"You are too good to me. I often feel that I'd like to be bossed."

It was not the only time she said that to him. Manlike, addicted to reason, he was blind to such truths as women, even young girls, have by intuition. He was puzzled by this desire "to be bossed." He could have understood it in an oriental woman, but in her, with her modern education, her pursuit of the fine arts (formerly the sole possession of the male), and a suffragist mother (notwithstanding which, Mrs Gwynne confessed her preference to working with men!), this attitude seemed an anachronism, not to be taken seriously. In short, he tried to treat her as a separate individual, a comrade and an equal. If he condescended at all, it was to treat her as a child, who, with her eyes full of fear, seemed to ask for his pity; what he did not then understand was that it was not for pity but cruelty that her eyes so vainly craved. It was he who was the pathetic, credulous child.

XIV

She had spells of intense sadness, which he and her mother made vain efforts to dissipate. Again, there were moments of fearful despair, when she would cling to him as to her last refuge, and, lying in his arms, would pathetically cry out:

"Do take me away with you, anywhere! Only away from here!"

"From your mother?"

"From everyone! I can't stand it any longer!"

What could he say or do? He felt himself to be a petty Prometheus, one of many in this age, consumed by his own fire, held in leash by economic bonds. The hungry, helpless, childlike Gombarovs: how could he abandon them?

There was one evening he was never to forget. It was a few days before the Art School's autumn ball. It was to be an Arabian Nights' Entertainment, and Winifred made suitable garments for both of them. She was an

Arabian Princess, he an Arab Chieftain. They were trying these on at the flat: she in one room, he in the other. Mrs Gwynne was not at home.

"Are you ready?" called out Winifred.

"Yes, you may come in."

In an orange bloomer costume decorated with beads and silver trinkets; her eyes seductively peeping over an orange veil, the dense black of her eyebrows and hair a fascinating factor in the picture; her small feet encased in exquisite slippers with pointed, upturned toes; she entered the room: a slender Eastern virgin out of *Scheherezade*.

An admiring cry broke from Gombarov: "You are simply wonderful, Winnie!"

"Nonsense!" she cried. "I'm but a poor thing beside you. Just go and look in the large mirror in the other room!" She took him by the hand and led him to the mirror.

The effect on his mind was extraordinary. For the first time in his life he saw something that commended itself in his physical appearance. His long white oriental tunic, with waist-girdle, and his close-fitting headgear with the flap at the back fitted him perfectly. The long features of his dark-skinned face stood out with startling clearness. There was something bold and audacious in his look, which was that of a horseman in the desert or of a mountaineer. Above all, the astonishing fact flashed across his mind: he was and had never ceased being an oriental; an ancient Jew of the East, an Arab, an Afghan, anything but a European! Strange, unaccustomed thoughts entered his head: memories, as it were, of some other wholly forgotten existence, lived elsewhere and at some other time, more harmonious with his real temperament, which was now overcrusted and obscured by drab thoughts and a drab life, as unfitting to him as the drab garments of his remembered life. There was, as well, a physical lightness about the garments, which left his limbs free and unfettered. Narcissus-like, he saw in the reflection his beloved mate, his true soul; and had he been contemplating himself in a deep spring or well, instead of in a mirror, he doubtless, in his dreaminess, would have fallen in and vanished from the world together with his reflection. At that moment he did not closely analyse his feelings; only afterwards, in looking backward on the strange episode, he remembered having felt as one

possessed and as having regarded with a peculiar intimacy something that, to all appearances, should have been quite strange to him.

He stood so long contemplating himself that Winifred, watching him intently, said at last:

"I believe you are in love with yourself!"

"I am, when I look like that," he replied.

"I don't think I had better take you to the ball, for fear the girls might fall in love with you," she said, laughing.

He pulled her over to him. Cheek to cheek, their arms around each other's waist, they stood before the mirror, laughing and admiring themselves, like children.

"Look at yourself, Winnie. You are simply wonderful. Quite out of 'Arabian Nights.'"

"No, no; it's you who are wonderful!"

"No, it's you!" And to get the last word in, he shut her off with kisses.

"I say, Prince Abdullah," she said, when she got free.

"Speak, Princess Fatima. The Prince feels in a gracious mood, and anything the Princess asks will be granted."

"Don't make any rash promises. When will you bear me away to your palace of onyx and jade?"

"At once, if you like!" Before she could utter a word of protest, he lifted her in his arms, and bore her to the couch, where he deposited her.

"This is my palace, Princess," he said. His knee on the floor, he bent over her, and whispered loving things to her.

"No, no," she said, putting her arms round his neck. "This is the couch I have known for years and that I am thoroughly sick of. When are you going to take me away from here?"

"You know, Winnie, how things are at present. I'm doing my best."

"When will things be any better? We shall be old people, John, by the time your people do anything. It isn't fair. And you ought to be doing something for yourself. You would be doing big things, if you had the least chance. One feels that about you. And you want to marry me. You sometimes come to me as if you had a great, great millstone round your neck . . ."

"It's quite true, but don't talk about it to-night, Winnie. I feel so happy to-night, quite drunken with

happiness. . . . Don't you feel it in my hands?" He stroked her with his hands, which truly contained a kind of distilled passion, the very essence of life; creative, healing and disturbing, all at the same time.

"Yes, that's the trouble," said Winifred. "It's that that makes me talk like this. You make me feel so much a woman. . . . There are times when I'm with you when I feel like tearing my clothes off. . . . That is when I cry in your ear: 'I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!' . . . And I feel like it now. . . ." And she began to tug at the garment round her neck as if it were very irksome and she really wanted to tear it off; while in her eyes that look of fear was passing into one of utter helplessness and despair. She let her arms fall at her sides as she cried:

"Take me! Take me!"

His earlier exhilaration had disappeared. He felt round his neck that millstone of which Winifred spoke only a short while before; and for a few moments it seemed as if his whole body had metamorphosed into stone; and only in two tiny chambers of him, heart and mind, two separate contending flames fiercely blazed: one wild, impetuous, leaping; the other ethereally bright, clear and steady, penetrating every corner and illumining, as it were, a gallery of pictures, remembered from the past and projecting into the future, of bitter experience and much-enduring: one especially, of Winifred, a babe in her arms, looking miserable; no longer a fascinating girl, but a restive creature fuming under a life of drudgery, her mother in the background, with reproachful, ever-accusing eyes; himself a hack-journalist, torn with remorse, with no hope of ever again lifting a rebellious finger against life, unless it were his own; and in the receding background the Gombarovs, the helpless, the childlike, holding up their hungry open mouths to the sky as one brood of birds waiting for an unreturning mother! In short, a picture of poverty, suffering, a life of enduring and, above all, of eternal hatred. All this came as one instantaneous picture, flooded in that clear light, which softened and became a light of pity. How could he tell her? He tried to say: "I've made a solemn promise to your mother that I wouldn't . . ." But it somehow came through his tears, in broken, jagged, meaningless accents.

She was crying now. The irrevocable moment was

over. He knew that he had committed the unforgivable sin, the one sin a woman never forgives. "F-fool!" something whispered in his ear. He needed no outside voice to tell him that his self-abnegation, the victory of his will and reason over passion, would cost him dear. He knew that the self-thwarted flame, working inwardly, would corrode him with redoubled fury.

Of a family of doctors, it was perhaps not strange that he should have been able to diagnose his own malady, which he did in a subsequent reflection: "To have a mind is in itself bad enough; to have a heart in itself is bad enough. To have both heart and mind in a world in which it is better without either is appalling!" How to cure the disease? Some diseases are incurable; one must learn to suffer. The placid world may console itself that suffering is good for a man's art—provided, of course, it doesn't kill him. Gombarov himself was not above this consolation.

"A healthy oyster," he had once observed to Bayliss, "is good for eating; a diseased one turns to a pearl, and is a joy for ever, and goes down the generations from one pretty neck to another. That is art!"

CHAPTER XI

I

IN the spring the Gwynnes removed to Lily Dale, a village twenty miles out of town. They took a small century-old cottage in the original village, situated in the valley; it had oak beams and a large open fireplace. The people who lived in the valley belonged for the most part to the poor professional classes, who dabbled in the arts and crafts, and were attracted hither by the "arty" atmosphere of the place. In close proximity were the bizarre buildings of the now defunct Lily Dale Arts and Crafts Guild, the original members of which were firmly convinced that all the social evils would be cured if the world would only consent to sit in a Morris chair and watch a set of long-limbed, long-necked Burne-Jones virgins dreamily trail down a palatial stair. Nice, well-intentioned people, long-haired men

and short-haired women, usually not without handsome, hand-bound books under their arms—" Morte d'Arthur," " Aucassin and Nicolette " or " The Blessed Damozel," as the case might be—they " did their bit " (to use a phrase coined much later) against the steady, ruthless invasion of the Chimneys; their valiant effort failed simply because the world would not be persuaded to sit down in a Morris chair, just as the sparrow would not be persuaded to stop long enough for the boy to put salt on its tail. People wouldn't read " Blessed Damozel," and Marie Corelli wasn't worth a calf binding. Up on the hill, overlooking the valley, were a number of large new houses, each with a garage attached. Rich suburbanites lived in these: possibly it was only a coincidence that they all had motor-cars and they all were curiously dumb; at all events, no one in the valley had ever heard one of them speak. They made their presence felt, chiefly through the loud, violent snorting of their iron beasts and the twenty-horse-power smells with which they filled the otherwise quiet valley as they dashed speedily by.

Gombarov spent here his day off, and at least two evenings a week besides. He usually stopped for the night, occupying the little guest-room, and giving the neighbours something to talk about. His train journey was always a journey of anticipation, from which may be gathered that there was no lessening in his love. Like all love-affairs it went on with its ups and downs, its little quarrels and reconciliations, its depressions and exultations. Then, in the midsummer, came a week of happenings.

II

It was towards the end of July. Gombarov was away on his holiday, in a less frequented part of the New Jersey coast. He had been there quite alone for some days, and whiled away his time in bathing and sitting along the sand dunes in the sun. The coast was very flat; nothing was to be seen but sand and marshes and sea; and in the distance a few straggling wooden huts. Not a tree, not so much as a bush, was in sight. Terrible days came of arid heat. The newspapers reported hundreds of prostrations in town; but here, on the coast, there was no relief. All day the sun beat down with a

pitiless, blinding dazzle of light. The sand was too hot to sit on, and the almost crackling heat of the air made one feel faint. There was no place in which to take shelter. The water was an immense smooth grey-golden polished stone reflecting a world of light, and the black breath of a far steamer left a motionless hanging trail in the cloudless sky. There was, it is true, one place where one might take shelter from the glare if not from the heat. That was the porch of the house, but here swarms of mosquitoes came, attacking the face and neck and penetrating the thin gauze at the ankles. As the days went on and there was no abatement of the sun's holiday, Gombarov grew more and more restless, and at last desperate. One day, after lunch, he decided to take the first train back to town. There was a train at half-past five, arriving at half-past seven.

Once in town, he rang up the Gwynnes. In reply to his question, Winifred told him he might come out if he liked. He noted a nervousness in her voice, which he ascribed to the heat. Luckily, there was a train waiting; he just managed to catch it. By nine o'clock he was at Lily Dale.

The valley drowsed under the heat. There was a stillness and oppressiveness in the air as before a thunderstorm. Some fifteen minutes' hard walk, or ploughing through the retarding air, brought him to the cottage. The cottage was dark, and the doors were all open; he found the Gwynnes in the drawing-room, and though he could not clearly discern their faces, he was conscious of their being in a state of nervous unrest. They were unusually restrained and quiet, and received him without those manifestations of welcome, not to say joy, he had reason to expect after a week's absence. It was as if a bad conscience hovered above their heads in the oppressive, still air of the room, and was suffocating them with its evil fumes. He sat down near Winifred, and took her hand, which responded but faintly to his pressure. He decided that it could not be altogether the heat that thus affected them. He patiently waited for an explanation.

"There must be a bat in the house," at last volunteered Winifred.

"We returned from town just before you rang up, and found bats in the house," said Mrs Gwynne. "It is possible they came down the chimney, and so we've closed up the fireplace. We've killed three, and as they are

usually supposed to come in pairs, we are afraid there's a fourth about somewhere."

Mrs Gwynne had barely finished speaking, when they heard a flapping of wings on the narrow staircase, approaching nearer.

"There!" exclaimed Winifred.

The three of them rose simultaneously, in a state of agitation. Mrs Gwynne quickly lit a candle and found a palm-leaf fan.

"We killed the others with a fan," explained Winifred nervously.

"Give me the fan," said Gombarov, trying to hide his own agitation. He had a horror of bats, and the idea of killing one sent a cold shiver through him. A feeling of foreboding entered his heart at the same time: it seemed an ill omen to kill a bat. He felt that he was deliberately tempting the fates: but there are occasions in life when even the fates must be tempted; for to avoid them is to tempt them also.

He resolutely seized the fan, while Mrs Gwynne held up the candle, which dimly lit up the staircase. Furiously he struck with the fan at the fluttering black object, dazzled for the moment by the appearance of light. There was a resounding fall, and it landed, dead, at the foot of the stairs. Mrs Gwynne gathered it up with a small shovel from the grate and deposited it in a pail outside. She blew out the candle.

Once more they entered the dark drawing-room, and no sooner were they seated, without any of them having said a word, than they suddenly started up again in a listening attitude. Again came that familiar, uncanny flapping of wings, but this time it gave the effect of a multiple-winged flapping.

"Oh, mother, I believe the house is full of them!" exclaimed Winifred, in a voice full of alarm.

Mrs Gwynne re-lit the candle. "Here, Winnie, you hold the candle," she said, "while John and I settle the flying devils."

Armed with fans, Mrs Gwynne and Gombarov effected their passage by killing three bats on the stair. Then they entered the large bedroom occupied by the Gwynnes. Here the bats appeared to be circling in great numbers. With the intrusion of the light, they slowly settled here and there. Mrs Gwynne lit the bedroom lamp. Now they could be seen clearly: one on a picture-frame, another

hanging head downwards on a clothes hook, a third clinging to the window drapery, a fourth to the leg of a chair, a fifth plainly visible on the distempered wall, and so on, and so on. Other weapons than the fan had to be applied: Mrs Gwynne went down and fetched a couple of sticks. And once more the shovel and the pail. In the attic they encountered the same experience. They systematically searched every crevice and corner, as well as the wardrobe, until they thought they had thoroughly rid the house of the extraordinary guests. The cottage was by this time wholly lit up, which must have greatly astonished the neighbours.

"I think we've cleared them all out," said Mrs Gwynne, wearily. "I wonder how they could have got in. Certainly not through the chimney, because we've closed up the fireplace. Now, it's time to go to bed, children. It's so hot I think I'll sleep downstairs on the floor."

Gombarov retired to his little room, the door of which opened out on the stairs leading to the attic. The door itself was not shut but overhung with a piece of drapery, giving access to the air above and below, the window facing it being kept open. After his trying day by the sea, his two train journeys, his battle with the bats, and his general impressions of the day, he felt very tired and drowsy. He no sooner closed his eyes and got into a state between dreaming and waking, than he thought he heard his name called. He rubbed his eyes and looked round him. Something dark was circling round and round his head. He suddenly remembered, and reached out for the fan, which he had taken the precaution to have with him.

"John!" he heard his name called on the other side of the drapery.

"Yes?"

"They are all over the house again! Come and help mother."

"I'll be with you in a moment, as soon as I have dispatched the fellow in my room."

Again the lamp was lit and the battle resumed. Again darkness, silence, an effort to sleep. They came back intermittently all night, until the light began to break, if not in as great numbers as before. Gombarov lay in his cot, only half-asleep, starting up at the least semblance of a noise. He lay there, as he said laughingly

afterwards, feeling as if he were "one large ear," sensing the air.

The next day they all walked sleepily about the house or out of doors, wondering whether the adventure would be repeated. They made a search of the house, but could not discover how the bats could have come in.

No sooner the dark came than they started again nervously at the uncanny flapping of wings on the stair. Again the fans began to work; again that unaccountable feeling, which you had at every stroke, of bringing a shower of troubles on your head; again towards daybreak the disappearance of the nocturnal visitors. By this time Gombarov got so used to them that in his sleepy weariness he felt half-conscious of a solitary bat circling round and round his head, without stirring to reach for his fan. When he awoke it was ten o'clock, and as he rubbed his eyes he wondered whether he had not had a nightmare. He looked out of the window; then his eyes fell on a red stain on the floor. A foreboding of countless troubles persisted in his heart.

After breakfast he again searched the house. He made a thorough examination of the attic, to which his mind invariably returned. There were some cracks in the floor here, but these did not appear large enough to allow a bat to pass. He bent down, and put an ear to some of them. There was no sound directly under his ear; but a strange singing as of mice came from the near proximity. He moved in its direction, and again listened.

"Winifred!" he suddenly called out.

Winifred came running up.

"Put your ear there."

"What a flapping of wings! There must be dozens and dozens there! They must have got in through the eaves."

The important thing was to find where they came out. Gombarov moved his ear along the floor, following the sound of the flapping, until he reached the staircase. Just at the corner of the staircase, concealed by an overlapping plank, was a tiny hole. He hammered something over it. A further search failed to reveal any more openings.

They awaited night half in hope, half with misgiving: but were not disturbed again.

III

Gombarov's troubles began the very next day.

He and Winifred were sitting in a neighbouring meadow. She had been strangely indifferent to him since his return, and he was feeling his way to get at the cause. For a long time she parried his efforts, but at last nervously blurted out:

"I say, John, don't you think we had better call it off?"

Her remark left him speechless, while his hand; as it were, lifeless; slipped out of hers.

"I don't understand," he said at last. "What do you mean? You mean that . . ." He could not finish the sentence: his words, like his body, were dead.

"You see, my dear," she went on to explain, "my mother thinks I ought to marry a gentleman."

In the now vacant parlours of his stunned mind but one word danced up and down (hardly a word, but a figure!) derisively flaunting a top hat, a white shirt-front, a black swallow-tail, an immaculate crease in the trousers and shining patent-leather shoes. He was but conscious of one taunting, dancing, dressed-up word: *Gentleman!* Other words had lost their existence for him; had become, at all events for the moment, ineffectual, silent wall-flowers, who, with dead eyes and murderous hearts, were watching the self-satisfied antics of the angular black figure, now with a lovely slender girl in its arms.

Gombarov lay, his face buried in the grass, and did not move; nor showed he the least sign of life; but his hands had a fierce clutch on the grass, as if his whole life had concentrated precisely there.

"Speak! For heaven's sake, speak!" cried Winifred, putting a hand on his head.

He could not if he wanted to; for the earth, the great consoler, was receiving the tears of his unspoken fury.

"Please, speak!" she persisted. "You are the last person on earth that I want to hurt. I only meant that mother wants me to marry a man of position, who'll be able to . . ."

Gombarov suddenly raised his head and interrupted her:

"So you and your mother talked over matters while

I was away . . . and I thought the hot weather and the bats were responsible for the indifference with which you received me."

"There! one can't speak to you without you being sarcastic! Mother's a very fine woman, if you only knew; and she's very fond of you."

"Too fond of me!" was on his tongue, but he restrained himself. Instead, he merely observed:

"What is not clear to me is how you could possibly part with me on terms of such great tenderness, and but ten days later, after an absence, tell me this!"

"I've been thinking very hard. . . ."

"Very hard, indeed. . . ."

"There! you're again sarcastic. . . . Don't you see, I want to live, I want to see something of the world, I want to meet other men. . . . Haven't you met other women?"

"I thought you were different. . . ."

"Whose fault is it that you can't manage women?"

"Yes, yes, I see that. I'm not enough of a hypocrite. I've made the mistake of always revealing my feelings; for I trusted you, and I thought I could hold you by love alone. It is now a year and a half since we've loved each other. I was willing to sacrifice everything for you. Great love comes but once. . . . Can you afford to throw it away—for a gentleman?"

"Mother and I have decided to go to Europe—in the spring," she said, ignoring his question.

This last piece of information quite cut the ground under his feet. He felt himself sinking deeper and deeper into abysmic hopelessness.

So that was the end—the end! It seemed to him that this was the end of all things to him. Had he not better put a bullet into his head at once?

"Well, I suppose I had better clear out," he said, looking at the ground in a lost way.

"No, no, no!" she cried—and there was pathos in her voice—"if you cared for me one little bit, you wouldn't say that. It would be terrible if you went. I would miss you horribly. I don't think I shall ever love anyone else. You must promise to stay. This is more than I can bear. . . ." She burst into tears.

He couldn't make her out. What was the meaning of this wanting and not wanting? He knew her incapable of playing a double rôle, such as Muriel had played. He

felt fatigued and nervous after the week's ordeal; his usually plentiful reserves of nervous force were exhausted; he was unable to react against this new squall. His thoughts—if the scattered, as it were wave-tossed cargo of his mind could be called thoughts—were in a helpless whirl, yielding to every change of wind. He made an effort and managed for an instant to find his voice.

"You know," he said, "I don't believe in platonics and that sort of nonsense; and I don't believe you do, either."

She did not respond to that, but merely moaned:

"I wish I were dead. I wish I were dead."

He made an effort to harden himself against her tears; nevertheless, he was moved.

"Let me think matters over," he said at last. "I simply can't think just now."

They rose and silently walked back to the house, her arm hanging on his.

He went into the small bedroom and threw himself face downward on the cot. He could not think, but simply lay there, inert with misery and weariness.

Later, Winifred came in and, bending over his now upturned face, looked at him with that familiar frightened look of hers. She kissed him, and cried a little, and walked out.

Shortly afterwards, a sudden thought struck him, a tiny rift of light in a sodden sky.

IV

As he recalled, one by one, the details of the interview, there was but one way in which he could explain its contradictions, Winifred's alternate moods of hardness and tenderness. The latter he was accustomed to; the former he had never suspected. He could not but conclude that her mother had a great deal to do with it. Not that she, with a deliberate directness, had told her daughter to do this and not to do that; but rather by more potent methods of indirection, by a series of insidious suggestions, dropped as it were inadvertently, had poisoned her against him; eventually, seizing on his absence, had used all her strategy in throwing out such bait—Europe, young men, and the like—as was calculated to bring about a revulsion of feeling and swing Winifred's

affections away from Gombarov towards herself. He now recalled many things, some of them trifles, to which he gave no heed before. There was, to begin with, Mrs Gwynne's original fondness for him, not exactly, as he often suspected, of a maternal character. There had also been warnings he had received from two or three persons who knew Mrs Gwynne. The usual formula was: "Oh, yes, I like Winifred. She's a fine girl; but there's always that mother in the background!" He had always waved these warnings aside. He was so sure of Winifred; and so trustful of her mother. But now it was precisely that he felt: the looming shadow, more than a shadow, of her mother in the background; and this, as it were atmospheric shadow, felt rather than seen, threatened, perhaps had already accomplished, the ruin of the happiness of two young lives. Bitterly he reflected that once he had been the stronger factor, and that had he not been honourable, in the conventional sense, had not let caution get the better of passion, he could have defied all shadows, maternal and infernal. He would have been saved this futile pity for himself and this girl. Negation is damnation: he was much to blame.

What was to be done now: put an end to himself or fight? He mentally pictured the dramatic scene of himself: a haggard-looking figure, coming in, sitting down with them in a listless, hang-dog fashion, then with a sudden Byronic gesture drawing a revolver out of his bosom—yes, precisely out of his bosom—and *biff* against the temple. They would no doubt feel very sorry, even cry a little now and then during the first few weeks; but somewhere deep in Winifred's heart would remain a sweetness, a subconscious pleasure, which may or may not develop in time to the ripe expression: "A man once loved me enough to kill himself on my account!" Suddenly, stirred with new energy, he jumped from his cot. "I'll be damned if I'll give them that satisfaction!" he exclaimed, half-aloud. "I'm going to fight!"

V

How ridiculously childlike a man can be when, armed with nothing more substantial than much love and a little hope, he sets out, St George-like, to fight that most unmanageable of dragons: a woman with a benign smile

and a heart as full of sharp points as a porcupine! There were times when he thought he was quite wrong about her: for she bore herself sympathetically towards him, almost invariably sided with him against Winifred in intellectual differences (which had not existed before), and in differences such as arise between lovers who, after a long quarrelless existence, have suddenly found that there are so many things in life to quarrel about. Mrs Gwynne would even urge her daughter to say that she was sorry, and to sit on Gombarov's knee. In spite of this accumulation of evidence that nothing would please Mrs Gwynne better than to be an expectant mother-in-law, there was the confession of Winifred's, doubtless unintended, that her mother desired her to marry a "gentleman," a word that persisted in sticking in his throat, and which all the blandishments on Mrs Gwynne's part failed to dislodge. Such is the power of a single word. On occasions, it is true, Winifred behaved toward him as tenderly and passionately as before, clinging to him as if she would never let him go; but next day her demeanour would undergo a change as violent as any ever shown by the native climate. As earlier, there had been two Muriels to him, so now there were two Winifreds; it baffled him to see her pass from her passionate mood to one of absolute indifference and practical to the point of cynicism. "It is better for us each to go his own way," she once said to him; "in this world everyone is for himself." These seemed to him to be terrible words. Or was she cruel merely to be kind, just as her mother was kind merely to be cruel?

He could understand love, he could understand hatred; but he could not understand wine and wormwood coming from the same bottle. The sweet moments gave him hope; and this hope, a thread growing more slender every day, gave him strength to put up with the increasing humiliations to his manhood. He knew it was all wrong; he felt it was paying a high price even in the event of ultimate victory; nevertheless, he persisted, could not help but persist; Winifred was in his blood, and it was not the sort of thing one could cure with a spring tonic. Critical of Winifred, no less critical as a spectator of his tragi-comedy, his love did not diminish, rather increased; which was natural, since no prize becomes so valuable in our eyes as when it begins to elude our grasp. There was little consolation for him in that Roney and Tommy

were still paying their share of tribute to the refined cruelty of "artistic" girls. He suffered terrible moments, when with fury he would watch Winifred move about the room with a nonchalant air; and a savage instinct would rise in his breast, urging him to spring at her and possess her by force; and he would curse himself for his earlier foolish, misplaced pity.

VI

In the early autumn they removed to town. They were now busy sewing dresses and with preparations for their journey abroad. Their thoughts entangled in ribbons, ruffles and lace, it was not to be expected that they had a thought to spare for Gombarov, who made every effort to discontinue his visits. Many a time he would drag himself to the door of their house, linger with a hand on the bell, or walk in front of the house, up and down, up and down, then trail back the way he came, without coming in. He would stay away for days at a time, at the end of which he would be sure to get a letter begging him, for pity's sake, to call.

Arid days and nights came for his spirit; as relentlessly arid as, in a physical sense, were the days he spent by the sea just before the bat episode; there was no place in which to take shelter from the overwhelming rays of the cruel sun of misfortune. Yet, at moments, there was just one place: in the company of men, and especially in that of his friend Bayliss. Bayliss was extraordinary: he actually, at times, could create for Gombarov a mood of exultant happiness: strangely enough, out of the very thought of his "escape" from two pernicious petticoats. And again his thoughts began to waken to the call of London.

The nights were hardest to bear. He would lie there, thinking, thinking . . . until, to escape his thoughts, he would burrow his head deep into the pillow, very much as an ostrich burrows his head into the sand; if there was a way to hide his head, there was no hiding the thoughts in it.

Or the idea of self-destruction would return to him, which always culminated in the fierce self-assertion: "I won't give them that satisfaction!"

Or he would sit up until dawn writing letters to her, full of the most reckless passion, and, dissatisfied with

his "technique," would tear each one up in its turn. Next day he would laughingly say to Bayliss: "I am serving my apprenticeship to literature!"

His ordeal, on top of his early struggles and privations, affected his health; but neither physical fatigue nor deep weariness of the spirit would cause him to rest. He worked as hard as ever at the office, or walked the streets for hours, as if possessed by some indefatigable demon.

One cold, penetrating autumn day, he was walking to the trolley, on his way to the office. He breathed very heavily and he felt terribly weak. Every slight gust of wind caused him to stop and to lean against a lamp-post or a wall. He had thought of turning back home. It seemed hours before he reached the trolley. All day he worked hard at the office He looked in at the doctor's on the way home.

"How long have you been like this?" asked the doctor, after making an examination.

"The last two days."

"You mean to say you've been walking the street the last two days in this condition? Go home at once, my boy, and get to bed. You have pneumonia. I shall look you up presently."

"I wonder whether she'll come and see me before I die," thought Gombarov, lying in bed quietly and looking up at the ceiling.

But he did not die. He recovered very quickly, and in a few days he was back at work, in spite of the protests of his mother.

He was astonished by a visit from the Gwynnes at the office. They hadn't seen him for a long time, so they thought they would look him up. He told them how he had walked the streets, with pneumonia.

"You are mad!" exclaimed Winifred.

"You need someone to take care of you," said Mrs Gwynne.

"I'm not so mad as to look for a substitute," said Gombarov.

VII

Early in December the fates sent Gombarov yet another distraction. He received an official notification that his name had been chosen on the wheel as a juror in the Criminal Court.

was ordered to take count of the jurors. He rose and walked among them, getting an answer from each in a whisper. There was no way for one juror to tell how the others voted. He came to Number 11, Gombarov, who whispered: "This is a case for discussion." The foreman looked indignantly at him. "I think so too," said the old man next to him—Number 12—who had overheard. The foreman walked back to his place, and announced: "The jury is disagreed." Whereupon the jurors rose and filed out of the room, and were conducted along the corridor by a petty official who dangled a bunch of keys. He stopped before a door and unlocking it admitted the jurors into a small bare room furnished with but twelve chairs. A small inner door, which was open, revealed a convenience. That was all.

After they were all seated, the foreman, a stout, pompous, florid-faced man, with drooping moustaches of an uncertain colour, dark-fringed from the effects of chewing tobacco, stood up, and glowering at the two disagreeing jurors, delivered himself indignantly, with violent arm-gestures and the stamping of feet. His speech ran somewhat in this fashion: "Gentlemen! As men, we ought to be ashamed of ourselves to have ever left the box without convicting the . . . As men, we are here to protect our womenfolk—God bless them! As men, we have mothers, wives, sweethearts, sisters and daughters; and as men, we're here to protect them! What are we here for, I ask you? They have stood by us—bless their hearts—and they expect us to do our duty as men and stand by them. What would my wife think if I came home to-night and told her that I and you fellows —twelve altogether, mind you, and all calling ourselves men—had let this fiend go scot-free? How could I ever look Lizzie and Mabel in the face?—that's my daughters, gentlemen; and one of them about to be married, too, to a nice clean young fellow, let me assure you! We as men ought to stand shoulder to shoulder for the purity of our womenfolk—if not we, who'll stand up for them? We must show an example to the world. I ask you, one and all, to bring a verdict of guilty. But let's hear what this young fellow's got to say. I, for one, say it would be highly interesting to hear what he's got to say for himself. . . ."

While listening, Gombarov watched the man's vehement antics, and he thought to himself: "What a

subject for Cruikshank!" He saw the others nodding approval of the foreman's speech, and realised that it would take clear thinking and courage to contend with their prejudices. The foreman's last remark gave him the idea that he was on trial.

"Perhaps you'd like to speak first," said he, turning to the old man, Number 12.

"No, no; I'll leave it to you to put the case," replied the old man, who had evidently begun to entertain doubts since he had learned that ten of the jurymen were for conviction.

"We are not here to discuss our private sentiments," began Gombarov, gathering up his courage. "We are not here to lynch the man. . . ."

"Lynch the man?" interrupted the foreman. "Lynching is too good for him! What do you think, gentlemen?"

The man's manner only strengthened Gombarov's resolve to speak firmly and clearly; his characteristic stubbornness came to his aid.

"That's all very well," he replied. "Lynching may be too good for him, if you like; but I've always been under the impression that the Courts of Justice were established to prevent lynching. After all, it doesn't make much difference whether a whole mob lynches a man, or twelve men are chosen to do the job."

"Now I say, what's the man been arrested for, if he ain't guilty?" interrupted the foreman.

"I was coming to that," said Gombarov. "The law says that a man is innocent until he's proved guilty. According to your way of thinking, a man is guilty until he's proved innocent. We are here to judge the man according to evidence; more than that: we are supposed to give the prisoner the benefit of any doubt. . . ."

"There's something in what he says," put in a rough-looking man, a blacksmith by trade.

"We are here to protect our womenfolk," persisted the foreman, getting redder and redder in the face, "and this young fellow is doing nothing but obstructing justice. As foreman of this jury I can't allow it, gentlemen; I simply can't allow it. Shall this young fellow—and a foreigner at that, by the looks of him—put down the law to us?"

"The law allows him his say," came the blacksmith to Gombarov's rescue.

"I'll put it clearly to you, gentlemen," resumed Gombarov. "When it comes to believing, I believe him guilty, with you: but there are one or two points of evidence which require clearing up—that is, if we are to judge at all on evidence." And Gombarov proceeded to elucidate certain points, and suggested that a question be sent in to the judge on one point in particular. He presented such a plausible case that the jury could not but comply.

Good humour was restored while they waited for an answer; at last it came, and was only half-satisfactory. Once more they started to discuss the matter.

"Gentlemen," said Gombarov, "there is just a faint possibility that the man is not guilty. The evidence is confusing and came mostly from hysterical women. I don't want to have it on my conscience. If, however, because of the defendant's age and his intoxicated state at the time he is alleged to have attempted the crime—which, after all, was not committed—you will vote a recommendation of mercy, I'll agree to vote Guilty with you."

After some discussion Gombarov carried his point.

The judge, however, pronounced a sentence of five years, and the old man, collapsing, was carried out of Court.

Gombarov's conscience was troubled. He felt as if he personally had pronounced the doom of five years on the prisoner, who, it was barely possible, was not guilty of the crime with which he was charged; though, to be sure, almost any jury would have convicted him. He refused to believe that he had divided the responsibility with twelve men, that his share was only a twelfth in it. The extraordinary case of a Virginia jury occurred to him: this jury acted as joint executioner, each member pulling a string to release the trap, whereby the prisoner departed, swinging, into eternity. "No, no!" thought Gombarov. "You cannot share responsibility. Every mother's son of them was fully responsible, as if he had done the whole thing."

After this, his first experience, it terrified him to think that justice, growing out of the idea of revenge, still remained revenge; that it was mere chance whether justice was meted out by honest, intelligent men or prejudiced, ignorant rogues. He clearly realised that justice depended less on governmental systems than on

men: and this again terrified him: for if Justice was not the keystone of a Democracy, how else could the arch of Democracy be maintained? And why was Justice depicted as a blind woman, balancing a pair of scales she could not see? A woman was surely swayed by emotions rather than reason; blindness was no virtue where clear-seeing was essential; and he saw clearly that it was possible for prejudice to outweigh either innocence or guilt. This was surely evident from the next case in which he took part.

A Jew huckster was the plaintiff, a negro was the defendant. The Jew accused the negro of snatching his purse, while he was giving change to a customer. The negro was undoubtedly guilty. The evidence was preponderously against him. The jury disagreed: ten were for conviction, two for acquittal. There were about a half-dozen nationalities on the jury, each speaking his own peculiar English in terms of his own peculiar trade. The two who voted for acquittal were both Irishmen. The deliberations began not by a discussion of the case, but by a joint declaration on the part of the small minority that they were prepared to leave the room only when the prisoner had been acquitted: they would stay a week there, if necessary. Gombarov began to speak, but was interrupted by one of the pair: "You are a Jew yourself, aren't you?" "You Jews always stick together," added the other. Gombarov protested, pointing to the overwhelming evidence. "But the evidence was also given by Jews," retorted the first Irishman. "I know all about them. They raise such a fuss when anything happens; then they begin to see things. The same thing happened to me once. I was accused of snatching a purse. I was let off, of course. No jury could convict me on flimsy evidence given by a lot of fussy Jews." Gombarov was taken aback by this line of argument; while a strange thought, a suspicion amounting almost to a conviction, stirred in his mind. "Is it possible," he thought, "that this man actually had committed a similar crime once, and was acquitted under similar circumstances of anti-Jew prejudice, and is now showing his sympathy for the negro placed in the same predicament? He certainly looks capable of it!" But he didn't dare utter his suspicion. Stranger still, the other jurors, while still convinced of the negro's guilt, one by one joined the minority; which shows what a power sheer

stubbornness can be. For a long time Gombarov was alone to hold out. The others gathered round him and tried to prevail upon him. "After all," at last argued one, "it isn't as if we were sending an innocent man to jail. We are acquitting a man. You can't have *that* on your conscience!" The juror had, in fact, hit upon a thought that had been stirring for some time in Gombarov's mind. "All right," said Gombarov. "I believe the man guilty, and so do you, and if I go back on myself, it's not because I agree with those two chaps, but because I'm always willing to err on the side of mercy." But Gombarov noted that the judge had an astonished look on his face when the verdict of "Not Guilty" was brought in.

Next came a petty case, full of pathos and comedy, which kept the Court in an uproar. A little middle-aged Italian pleaded guilty to having gone with "wilful aforethought and malice" to his sweetheart's house and destroyed the presents he had given her. In broken English he told his story of how he had courted the young girl, the plaintiff, in Italy; of how he had cared for her, helped her, had spent the bulk of his savings on presents for her; while yet in Italy she and he and her people and his people had agreed that she was to be his bride. They had been two years in America; of late, he complained, she had not been acting like the Italian girls at home, and he had caught her several times going out with young fellows who were neither of her race nor religion, and acting altogether in what was considered in his country as dishonourable for a girl who had promised herself in marriage to a man. It was true he had gone to her house and cut the presents he had given her into ribbons; but, after all, they were his, and he pleaded extenuating circumstances. Then she, a pretty girl, of about twenty, smartly dressed like other American girls of her class, speaking a fairly good English, differing from them but in her dark features, presented her case: she complained of his persecutions and declared that she had "broken the engagement" some time ago; after all, it was her prerogative to break an engagement if she wanted to. Of course, it would have been wrong in her country to accept presents from a man you did not intend to marry; but, thank God, things were different here! She was living in a free country, and in accepting presents from a man she did

only what other girls did: it was a very pleasant custom. Then witnesses were called. The judge argued that the man having presented the things to the girl, they were undoubtedly her legal property, over which he had no further jurisdiction; but taking into consideration the peculiar circumstances of the case and the fact of the man pleading guilty, he would act leniently, and give him but three months. It was hard not to laugh as the amusing details were told and shreds of ribbony, frilly things were produced in Court, but afterwards Gombarov lapsed into deep thought: it was surely something more than a comedy that he had witnessed; it was a clash between two civilisations. Which was right?

There was a fortnight of this. Then came the last case, on which Gombarov was foreman. Owing to its being the last case, there was a sense of impatience about the whole Court, from the judge down. Everybody appeared anxious to get done with it. It was a shoplifting case; the evidence was preponderously against the woman-prisoner. The witnesses were put through quickly. Gombarov was ordered to take count of the jury. An immediate verdict of "Guilty" was expected. Everyone was getting ready to leave. Gombarov walked among the jurors, who whispered: "Guilty"—all but one. Gombarov stood up and said: "The jury is disagreed." A wave of irritation swept through the room. The judge, showing his annoyance, ordered Gombarov to try again. Had Gombarov been astute in these matters, he would have warned the solitary juror of his isolation: as it was, the result was the same. Disgust was plain on the judge's face, from which the whole court-room took the cue; the jurors themselves showed annoyance. No sooner had the jury filed out into the corridor and discovered how matters stood than, without advancing further, they belaboured the one disagreeing member for his foolishness. He was quite astonished to find how matters stood, and at once announced: "All right, boys; I'm with you." The Court was in its turn astonished, when, but thirty seconds after having left the box, the jury filed in again and announced the expected verdict. Gombarov felt like laughing.

The whole experience affected him in a curious way. Civilised institutions began to frighten him more and more. He could not have been more terrified if he had

found himself in a jungle. Was there no justice, no pity in the world; but only prejudice, ignorance and cruelty? Where was one to run to?

CHAPTER XII

I

THE Gwynnes left in the mid-winter. Gombarov saw them off at the station. He felt broken and ill from his many trials, and had little resistance left to behave at parting as one who did not care. A spark of hope remained with him: hope of the eleventh-hour miracle. After all, they were civilised, cultured people: they would, at all events, doubtless try to be nice at the last meeting. He had not expected that each of them would hand him a cup of wormwood as a parting gift.

It was fifteen minutes before the departure of the train. The three of them were standing outside the railway carriage. The Gwynnes were telling him of the places they intended to visit before settling down in Paris. Mrs Gwynne's sharply accented words were just so many sounds to him, empty of meaning. His shattered nerves were giving way under the irritation of these sounds, as racking as the sounds of hard scratches on a slate. He waited. . . . Would a word come from them; but one word, which would show that there was a drop of humanity left in them? There was a kind of tightening in his heart, which slowly communicated itself to the throat. He felt as if he wanted to cry and couldn't; as if he wanted to speak and no word would come. Winifred suddenly turned on him:

"Don't be dramatic, John!"

Then Mrs Gwynne:

"Be a man!"

He drank the two cups of wormwood to the last drop, and felt a tingling in his blood, from head to foot, as of some disintegrating flame. Then he vaguely heard a whistle, felt two hurried kisses on his cheeks, saw a few figures scamper past him. Another instant, and the platform seemed to move; then there was nothing more than the glitter of rails where the train had stood.

II

Gombarov left the station, propelled by a force not his own, over which he had no control. He was vaguely conscious of moving at a terrific pace past meaningless walking figures, phantoms rather than men and women, with blank, expressionless faces. His eyes saw moving black and yellow spots in the air; and he felt himself borne along on wings rather than on his feet. Abstractedly he paused at the busy centres of traffic. What was the meaning of this hurry and scurry, this confused movement of phantasmic automatons, this dashing of horseless vehicles, this tooting of horns, this ringing of clock bells, this hubbub of street cries, this clatter of carts over cobblestones, this Black Maria which had just passed by, with human eyes peering through gratings?

As he walked on, he calmed down somewhat. If only his head did not feel like bursting! His head was truly on fire. An explosive malignant flame threatened to split him. And whirling round in this combustible chaos were all the events of his hard, comfortless life; of the life of the unfortunate Gombarovs; of the life he had seen and known, in a world in which there was neither love nor pity. Justice was his greatest passion; the sense of injustice the chief source of his suffering. He bore the suffering of the world in his heart: he was a vessel boiling and seething and over-running with it; with individual suffering and common suffering; he was a sensitive instrument which recorded the impressions of an injured and humiliated world. Scene upon scene crowded his mind: of life without boyhood, of youth without love, of love wasted in quest of love, of beautiful energy squandered in sterile work, of creative forces thwarted by the demands of machine-made society; everything gone, gone, gone—where, how, to what end? Poor Gombarovs: honest, guileless souls, children they were suffered to come into the world; what jury had condemned them in this great City of Brotherly Love, when they might have been acquitted in the Kingdom of Heaven? A vision came to him of the jury he had served on so recently. He had thought a great deal of that jury of late: it was to remain for him an incredibly fantastic picture of how ugly and perverse men can make

their souls, which in other conditions are capable of better things.

III

He did not go home at once. He stopped on the way at the doctor's. He had meant to do so long ago. He wanted something for his nerves, something that would make him stop seeing those yellow and black spots in the air. For some time, too, while in his room, smoking a cigarette, he would start suddenly and look over his shoulder, to see a fast-moving dark object, a cat or a mouse; realising as quickly that the illusion had been created by his nerves acting on the drifting tobacco smoke.

The doctor, a short, stout, middle-aged Italian, with enough good nature and common sense in his face to make one think of Æsop, seated him in a chair and questioned him. He began the physical examination by looking at his head.

"I don't like the looks of the arteries at the temples. They are large and swollen. If you allow yourself to be agitated and let your temple arteries swell out like this too often, they'll dry up, and you'll be an old man before you know it. Now take your shirt off."

The doctor then attached something around Gombarov's right arm and started a machine going. He stopped the mechanism after a few moments, and said:

"The pressure of your blood is far above the normal. You must be careful. I must try it again to-morrow."

"You know," he went on, as he proceeded with his examination, "you are one of those men who ought to marry. You need a woman—I mean, physically. Didn't you tell me last time that you had a girl? I don't believe in long engagements."

"Your advice comes too late, doctor," said Gombarov.

"Dear me! Gone off with another chap, I suppose," said the doctor sympathetically. "Most of the cases of nervous disorders in young men which come my way are the result of disappointment. So you are by no means a rare bird, if that's any consolation to you. Why, only a couple of months ago, a friend and countryman of mine came to me with a tale of woe. He got himself engaged to an American girl, and was ready to marry her at once:

but she asked for three months' grace, to take a holiday jaunt in Europe. She went, and he got a house ready for her, with everything in it, from a poker to a bed of down. She came back in three months, as she had promised; and, would you believe it? the hussy had a husband with her . . . ha, ha, ha! . . . The fellow was in despair, but not for long. He wasn't going to let his new furnished house go begging. He met a nice Italian girl, who had just come over from the old country. In a fortnight he married her. I was at the wedding myself . . . the other day. And so I say, find yourself a girl, my boy, and don't waste time courting. A woman is not a wine that gets better for the keeping. And there are always thieves about to steal your bottle . . ."

"I'm going abroad next month," said Gombarov.

"A good idea. A change will do you good. Come back to-morrow, and I'll try your blood-pressure again."

IV

When Gombarov returned home, he found Misha, his fifteen-year-old half-brother, lying on the bare, cold floor, studying a work of higher calculus, which he had just received from Germany; it being unprocurable in Philadelphia. The boy was a mathematical genius; otherwise he had the mind of a child. He jumped up excitedly on seeing John.

"You know what I'm thinking of doing?" said Misha.

"What?" asked Gombarov, looking at his brother's childlike face.

"I'm thinking of going to England on a cattle-ship and trying for a mathematical scholarship at Cambridge. In the meantime I've just taken a job as a grocer's boy."

"Poor devil! I wish I could help him," thought Gombarov, his mind reverting to his futile sacrifice for Absalom. "But I have need of help myself just now."

"That's not a bad idea," he said aloud, and went to his room. He threw himself into a chair, and was lost in reverie.

Poor Misha! Would he be wasted like the others? Like old Gombarov, like his Uncle Baruch, like Malkin, like Absalom, like the rest of that gifted host he had met so many years ago at the Shapiros'? Society had become like that fanatical Prohibitionist convert who could find no

better use for her cellars of rich red wines than pour them out into dirty sewers.

V

A few days later Mr Clarke spent an hour in trying to dissuade Gombarov from leaving the *New World*. He drew a terrible picture of an unknown literary man's life in a great city like London; of the privations and hardships he would have to face; of the loneliness and disappointment he would have to endure; of hunger and illness in a garret, etc., etc. It was foolhardy to leave a comfortable job that was good for life; but if he must go, why not take a three months' holiday in Europe, and return? He, Mr Clarke, would persuade the management to keep him on full pay. Gombarov was adamant. Mr Clarke, who was loath to let such a useful worker go, suggested that he would keep the job open for him for a year: he was sure that Gombarov, who had not left home before, would tire of his new hard life, and return.

While they were debating the matter, Mr Riggs entered the room. Mr Riggs had once been on the *New World*, and was now advertising manager of a department store. He joined in the discussion.

"Well, you are a chump to think of going to Europe on a fool's errand. As a sensible man, I ask you, what will you get out of it? Literature is a false alarm. There's no money in it. And if there's no money in it, what's the use of it? Take it from me: every man is worth as much as he gets. If you must leave the *New World*, why not join my staff of ad. writers? It's the only literature that's going, and it's the only literature that pays. As for readers, you'll have more readers than any book can ever get you. Just look at my full-page ads. Why, almost every man, woman and child reads my ads. My dear boy, the proof of literature is in the car you possess. I have two myself, I don't mind telling you. . . ."

Gombarov mumbled his thanks for the offer of a job, and was sorry he could not accept it, in spite of the emoluments it offered.

VI

A month later Gombarov went to the bank and drew out his savings: seven hundred and fifty dollars in all. Of this he gave two hundred and fifty to his mother. His ticket to Naples cost him seventy, leaving him four hundred dollars by the time he would have got to London to make a fresh start in life. He had just had his thirty-first birthday. His mother now made no objection to his going. She was, in fact, conscience-stricken at his having given up the twenty best years of his life to propping up the Gombarovs, and she saw that he was ill and half-broken. He had told her that if he didn't get away, he'd go to pieces; and she believed him.

All the Gombarovs were gathered at the door of the little house in the cul-de-sac when John left for the station to catch the train for New York. His steamer was going next day. He kissed them all good-bye at the door, and walked rapidly, to get out of sight; he did not look back; he was afraid to.

VII

That evening he slept in an hotel; and he had a strange dream.

He dreamt that he saw a crowd standing in a country road. As one person, they all suddenly looked up at the sky; he with them. He saw a man dangling in the air; as it were, in the clutches of a huge bird. Then he saw that it was not really a bird, but a horse, a horse with wings—Pegasus. He held his struggling victim between his hoofs, and was going higher, higher, always higher. The man struggled bravely, energetically. It was clear he would not give in easily. Then something enthralling happened. The man made a sudden desperate movement, with a mighty effort swung himself on to the back of the steed; he was now sitting upright, holding to the horse's mane. Conquered, the horse began to descend earthward. Then another strange thing happened: the horse no longer had wings, the man had them. Gombarov looked about him. Where he had seen a crowd before were now many men and many horses; and neither the

one nor the other had wings. He felt terribly afraid, and ran the gauntlet of horses and riders; he had a terrible fear that one of the horses would suddenly assume wings and whisk him off into the air as had happened to the man in the beginning of the dream. He was running desperately between two lines of horses, when he woke up. . . .

What was the meaning of the dream? After pondering for some time, it came to him clearly and unmistakably: "Fear not. You can, if you will!"

He jumped out of bed and vigorously began to wash and to dress.

VIII

Gombarov was standing in the stern of the steamer and watched the tall buildings of New York slowly vanishing from sight. A large red sun, having dipped behind the buildings, quickly blazed into a texture of red and gold, intersected by divergent spokes of light: a fan fit for the God-Mother. The buildings in the foreground became black; lost their third dimension; had the appearance of a black, far-stretching wall against red and gold. The picture brought associations in Gombarov's mind. He quite suddenly realised that he was running away from a wall, one of his walls.

Then he walked to the fore-deck, and, leaning on the rail, looked towards the East. A sudden calm came upon him as he watched the sunlit water, the cloudless sky, the gulls circling in the air. For the time being his thoughts left him: there was neither past nor future for him; and his face was a dispassionate mask.

Gombarov did not know that his life was just beginning.

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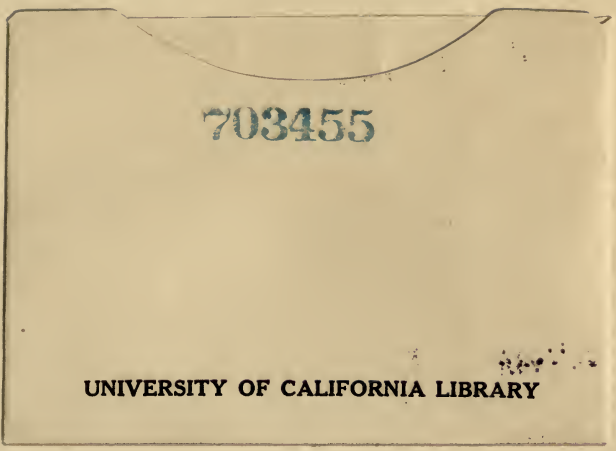
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